LOOKING AGAIN AT INDIAN ART

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To my young cousins

Sridharan, Bharatan

and

Somanathan

Contents

An Introduction

INDIA IS A land with a rich cultural and artistic heritage, and one with a religion that reaches back over 3000 years. Dotted all over this extensive country are remains of our ancient civilisation—of cities, temples and shrines of various kinds—all testifying to the glories of the past. Nearly all the artistic monuments of the pre-Muslim days are of a religious nature or were made for a religious purpose. Secular art must have existed, for ancient Indian literature tells us that kings lived in magnificent palaces, decorated with wall-paintings and sculptures. But all this has vanished. What has come down to us today is the religious art in the form of temples and sculptures of stone and images in metal—substances that have stood the test of time. We assume that the palaces of the rulers were built of brick and were decorated with wooden sculptures, all of which have perished in the hot humid climate of this country.

At the same time, it would be wrong to think that the religious monuments and images of our ancient times were the work of men inspired solely by religious fervour. Occasionally there must have been a craftsman inspired by religious emotion and a divine vision. But the bulk of India's ancient religious art came from the hands of secular craftsmen. These were men to whom sculpture and architecture was a profession. The craftsman was a member of a guild that would work for any patron, whether he was Hindu, Buddhist or Jain. On one occasion the sculptor

might be asked to make an image of the Hindu god Vishnu, on another that of the Buddha and on a third occasion that of a Jain *tirthankara*. The craftsmen worked, of course, according to priestly instructions. When they were told to carve images of gods on a particular section of temple wall, they did so. When they were left to themselves to complete the decoration of a particular wall or pillar, they filled it with the forms they loved and knew best. It is because of this we see so many figures of scantily-dressed women in provocative poses decorating various portions of our ancient temples. Nevertheless we can say that all the remains of our ancient art are of a religious nature, in the sense that they form part of a religious structure, and that all the sculpture is to be found decorating a religious shrine.

It is only after the coming of the Muslims that the idea of art for its own sake first appears on any large scale. The Muslims built a large number of religious structures, but they also built tombs, forts and palaces of stone. In addition, they developed the art of painting to a remarkable degree. Paintings to illustrate manuscripts had begun in pre-Muslim days, but the Moghuls now provided a great stimulus to the art, and many non-religious books were illustrated with such paintings. Today, of course, modern sculpture and painting are purely art for its own sake—carved or painted because it has some special significance for the artist, or because it gives pleasure to both the artist and the viewer.

Whatever part of the country we live in, we have one or more famous artistic monuments in our vicinity. We usually take these for granted and regard them as part of the scenery. It is our intention to look more closely at these monuments. All of us have noticed, I'm sure, that ancient Indian art has several unusual characteristics—unusal and peculiar to our twentieth-century eyes. We may have looked at relief carvings in stone belonging to the centuries B.C. such as those decorating the monuments at Sanchi, and we may have wondered how it is that the artists were so completely unable to depict depth or any three-dimensional effect. (Plate 4) Or, we may have looked at sculpted and painted scenes from mythology and commented on the fact that the main figure of a story is represented much larger than the surrounding figures, and somewhat out of proportion with the rest of the scene. (Plates 11, 14, 21) Or, we may have looked at frightening figures of the Tibetan gods and wondered how such images came into existence (Plates 57-59).

There are reasons for these and other peculiarities. Sometimes, the answer lies in the religious environment in which the artists worked; sometimes in the material that they handled; sometimes in their craft tradition. Certainly, we can admire a work of art without a knowledge of any of these circumstances. But to appreciate that art truly, it is necessary to understand the circumstances of its origin. And it is with this in mind that we shall be looking at ancient Indian art.

My choice of subjects for the chapters of this book has been governed mainly by the importance of the particular art sites and objects in themselves. At the same time, I have tried to choose monuments representative of the art of different parts of the country so that each one of you, wherever you live, might find one chapter at least that discusses a site in your area, and with which you are perhaps familiar. I owe a debt of gratitude to all those scholars who have written previously on the art and culture of our country, and from whom, over the years. I have imbibed much knowledge. Those whose views I have incorporated in any detail are accorded special recognition in the Notes and Acknowledgements at the end of the book.

1

Early Experiments in Stone : The Buddhist *Stupa* at Sanchi

SANCHI IS A site dear to the heart of Buddhists the world over, for they believe that enshrined there is a portion of the remains of the Buddha himself. It is a site equally dear to art lovers as providing examples of some of the earliest sculpture in stone to be found in India. From the town of Bhopal a two-hour journey by road through scrub forest dotted with occasional trees and an infrequent 'flame of the forest' brings you to the hill of Sanchi. A gentle climb then leads to the site of the *stupa* and the adjacent Buddhist monastery buildings.

A first glance, specially from a distance, likely to give you a feeling of disappointment. In front of you is a semi-circular mound paved with stones. There is a terrace running around it some 15 feet from the ground level. At the very top of the mound is a small balcony-like structure. And surrounding the mound is a stone railing with four gateways. Is this, you may ask yourself, the famous Buddhist *stupa* of Sanchi ? You will feel completely reassured as you get closer to the *stupa* and are able to see the famous gateways that are covered, every inch of them, with an astonishing variety of carvings. [Plates 1 and 2] The *stupa* is the focal point of the extensive Buddhist monastery at Sanchi. What is a *stupa* ? It is basically just an earthen mound containing relics of the dead. Originally such mounds were built over the remains of any important person. But soon, the *stupa* became a

The Sanchi Stupa. [*Plate 1*]

specifically Buddhist monument. It contained relics of the Buddha himself, or of one of his chief disciples, or sometimes it was even erected to mark a spot sacred in the history of Buddhism.

Today Buddhism is a religion associated mainly with Ceylon, with South-east Asia, and the Far East, including Japan and Korea. But Buddhism arose in India and was once a most popular faith in this country. The Buddha himself was a Hindu prince, son of king Suddhodhana and queen Maya of Kapilavastu on the borderland of Nepal. He was born in B.C. 563. The story is told in Buddhist scriptures of his divine conception. Queen Maya is said to have had a dream in which she saw a white elephant entering her womb. The prince was born too in an unusual manner. We are told that while queen Maya stood under a *sal* tree, the prince leapt out of her right hip and immediately took seven steps. The sages who came to the royal court predicted that the new-born

prince Siddhartha would either become a great emperor or renounce the world and become a great saint. The king took elaborate precautions to see that his son did not follow the latter course. He made sure that he saw nothing of the harsher realities of life and confined him solely to the beautiful palace grounds. He surrounded him with luxuries to make sure that he would have no desire to renounce the world. He was married to a beautiful young princess with whom he led a life of pleasure.

In course of time, however, prince Siddhartha began to feel a great urge to see the city, and he finally persuaded his father to let him drive out in the royal chariot. The king had the streets cleaned and decorated and he issued orders that only the young and beautiful be allowed along the route to be followed. But on this first ride, Siddhartha saw a feeble, broken-down old man on the wayside. Siddhartha was astonished since the realities of old age had been kept from his view. On three subsequent rides into the city. Siddhartha saw first a sick, diseased man, then a dead man being carried to the cemetery, and finally a calm and self-possessed monk. Contemplating these realities of life, Siddhartha decided to renounce the world he knew, and to go out in search of the Ultimate Truth and of the meaning of this earthly life of ours.

Siddhartha first tried severe penance and fasting, in the course of which his body was reduced to mere skin and bone. After six years of such penance he decided that this was not the way to discover the Truth. Giving up this method, Siddhartha went to Bodh Gaya and sat down under a *bodhi* tree, resolving not to leave that spot until he found the ultimate meaning to this life on earth. It was after long meditation under the *bodhi* tree that Siddhartha finally discovered the Truth he was seeking. After that he was known as the Buddha, which means 'The Enlightened One'.

The Buddha delivered his first sermon at Sarnath. He told his listeners to follow a Middle Path and to avoid both the pursuit of worldly pleasures and the practice of useless penances. The Buddha put forth the Four Holy Truths of his doctrine. These basically explained that all life is suffering; that the reason for the suffering is a desire for rebirth; that the end of suffering is through stopping that desire; and that the means to stop that desire is an eight-fold path of correct living. The eight-fold path consists of right speech, right conduct, right livelihood; then right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration; and, lastly,

right intentions and right views. After much striving in this direction comes *nirvana*— a state of release from earthly life and a state of salvation. The remaining years of the Buddha's life were spent in preaching and in gaining more and more converts to his faith. The Buddha died in B.C. 483 at the age of 80. On his death-bed he is said to have told his favourite disciple Ananda to build a *stupa* over the remains of his body after it had been burnt on the funeral pyre.

And so we are back to the *stupa*. At Sanchi, the *stupa* mound is thought to contain relics of the Buddha himself. The relics usually consist of ashes, bones or a tooth, and these are contained within a small vessel which was inserted into the very centre of the mound. On the Buddha's death, his remains were divided into eight portions and a *stupa* was built over each. Around B.C. 250 the emperor Ashoka, a great patron of Buddhism, opened up these eight *stupas* and redivided the relics among a very large number of *stupas*. His action was prompted mainly by his desire to see Buddhism spread all over the country. It was Ashoka who chose Sanchi as the site for one of his *stupas*. Ashoka's chief queen came from the nearby prosperous town of Vidisa and the emperor seems to have decided that this was reason enough to build a *stupa* there.

By B.C. 50, Buddhism had become a very popular religion in India. At this time, some 400 years after the Buddha's passing, the need seems to have been felt to convert the small Sanchi *stupa* into a more impressive monument. It was enlarged to nearly twice its size and covered with stone slabs from the Sanchi hillside. In addition, a stone railing with gateways was erected around it.

In B.C. 50 most houses, palaces and other structures were being built of wood, thatch and bamboo. To construct railings and gateways from stone was something quite new. One of the reasons for the use of stone must have been a desire to preserve the monument for future generations of worshippers. The architects, faced with the challenge of building in stone, found a simple answer. They decided to imitate exactly in stone the wooden structures they were used to building. The railing consists of pillars nine feet high, connected by three horizontal bars, each two feet wide. Over this were placed immense rounded stones to form the top of the railing. Although each of the parts is cut out of stone, each is a copy of the wooden original on which it is based. The

joints of the railing, in particular, are those used by carpenters and not by stone masons.

The entrance gateways too are modelled on wood and bamboo structures. Basically, they are of very simple pattern and consist of two tall square pillars connected by three horizontal, lightly-curved bars. The total height is 34 feet, with a width of 20 feet at the broadest part. The thickness of the whole is only two feet. The entire gateway is top-heavy and the method of jointing, as in the case of the railings, is logical for wooden construction, but irrational for stone. The gateways stand without struts or any other support. When Sanchi was rediscovered in the 1860s, one of the four gateways was still erect in its original position. Considering the method of construction used, it is amazing that even one gateway should have remained standing for some 1900 years.

The main attraction of the Sanchi *stupa*, however, is the relief sculpture depicting the story of the Buddha, that covers every portion of the stone gateways. When looking at this sculpture, we must remember that these are first experiments in stone. There were several difficulties facing the sculptor, of which the technical problem was the main one. He was faced, for the first time, with having to carve figures out of hard and

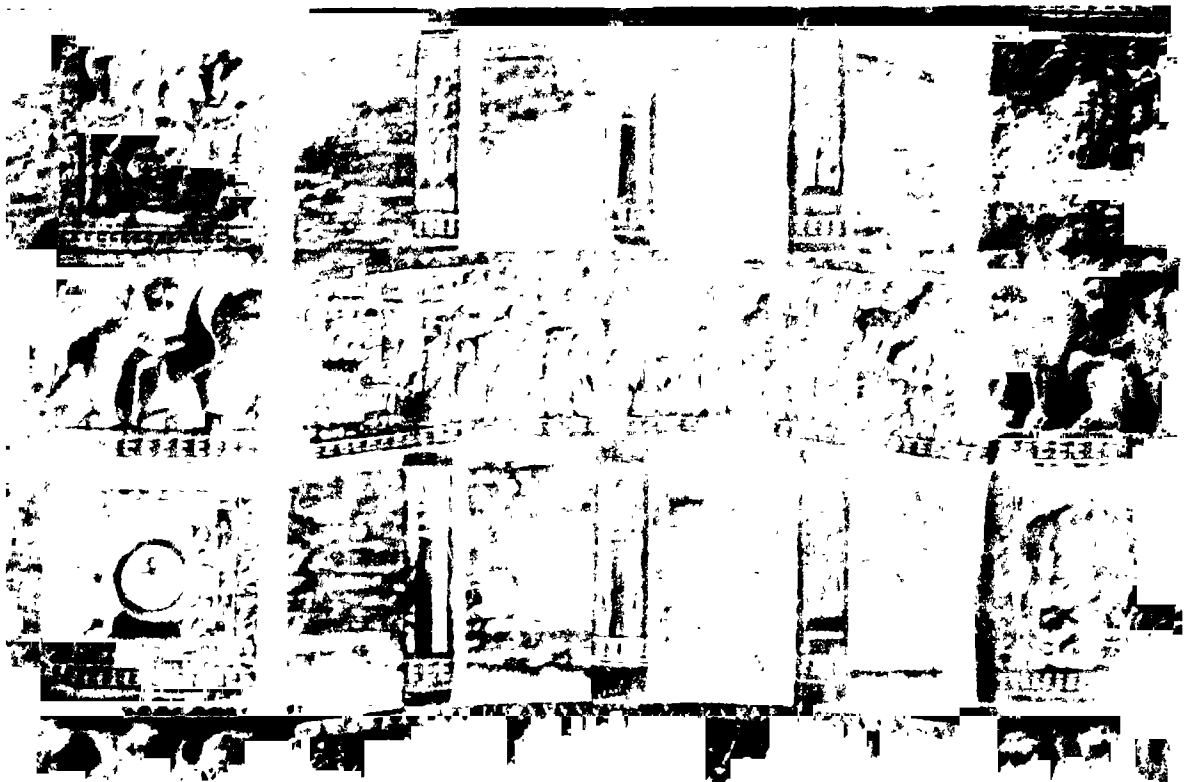
North gateway of the Sanchi Stupa. Note how every inch is covered with sculptural decoration. (*Plate 2*)

brittle stone, instead of the softer materials to which he was used. These were craftsmen trained in a tradition of wood-carving and ivory-carving. They now had to transfer their art to unfamiliar stone. Part of the archaic nature of the Sanchi carvings is due to this fact. The carving is always extremely shallow and very flat with no depiction of depth and with no attempt at creating a three-dimensional effect. The main character of a story was placed in the centre of a panel with subsidiary figures on either side, arranged basically in a symmetrical manner. The human body is depicted frontally and is rigid, often with feet turned sideways in the same direction. The profile was generally avoided.

A special feature to be noted in this early narrative sculpture is that the human figure of the Buddha is never represented. His presence is always indicated by a symbol of some sort—a throne, a *bodhi* tree, a *stupa,* footprints, or a combination of these. Look at Plate 3 for example. The upper panel depicts the scene of the Buddha, as prince Siddhartha, leaving the palace in search of Truth. There are four depictions of a horse with an umbrella held over it, but with no human figure seated on it. The umbrella here indicates the presence of the Buddha seated on horseback. At the end of the panel is a pair of footprints to depict the Buddha who has dismounted from his horse. The panel below shows a scene of the worship of the Buddha, and in the centre is a throne and a *bodhi* tree to suggest the Buddha's presence. The idea behind this use of symbols seems to have been that the Buddha, in attaining Enlightenment, had freed himself from all bonds, including the bonds of the human body. It was hence regarded as improper to represent him in the human form, from which he had gained his freedom. In chapter four we shall see that the human figure of the Buddha was later introduced into art. This occurred with the development of Buddhism from the orthodox Hinayana faith, taught by the Buddha, to the more popularised Mahayana Buddhism, in which the human figure of the Buddha replaced symbols. But in this early phase, only symbols were used. A large number of carvings at Sanchi represent episodes from the life of the Buddha, particularly the Birth, Leaving Home, Enlightenment, the First Sermon and the Death. But the forced absence of the human figure of the Buddha from the scenes of his own biography inconvenienced the sculptors considerably. They had

at their disposal only a limited number of symbols to depict the central figure of all their stories.

Many curious features in the sculptures of Sanchi are due to deliberate convention. One such striking feature is the method of continuous story-telling : within a single panel various incidents of a story are depicted so that the figure of the main character is seen three or four times, depending on the number of incidents depicted. Consider, for example, the story told in the upper panel of Plate 3 of the Buddha leaving home. To the extreme left is the royal palace. The horse with the umbrella held over it indicates the person of the Buddha. The horse with umbrella is repeated four times to indicate the Buddha's progress away from the palace. At the extreme end of the panel we see a pair of footprints indicating that the Buddha has dismounted from the horse. Below, we see the horse minus the umbrella, in other words, without its rider, being led back to the palace. In this instance immediately successive stages of the story are brought together. But often, events widely separated in time are also presented together in the same panel so that the time factor is altogether eliminated.

Details of East gateway of the Sanchi Stupa. [Plate 3]

Another convention is that figures are shown above each other on the ground of a relief, rather than being placed one behind the other, as in actuality they are. This is clearly evident in the lower panel of Plate 3 where we see three rows of figures, carved one above the other, but intended to represent figures one behind the other.

The panel on Plate 4 depicts carving of an archaic nature. The composition is symmetrical, the carving is extremely shallow, and there is no attempt to depict any three-dimensional effect. The story depicted is that of the Buddha converting the unbelieving Kasyapa brothers by performing the miracle of walking on water. In the upper part of the panel we see the Kasyapa brothers rowing out in a boat to rescue the Buddha. The Buddha, however, shows himself to be in no need of help by walking on the water. Since the Buddha was not to be shown in human form, his presence on the water is indicated by a slab of stone. The Kasyapas are converted by this miracle. In the lower portion of the relief we see them standing on the river bank with hands joined together, humbly worshipping the Buddha. The Buddha's presence is now indicated by the throne at the right hand corner of the panel. The artist has depicted nature not as it actually is, but in its most easily recognisable aspects. Trees are shown with greatly enlarged leaves and fruit, and one tree has monkeys on it. Waves are depicted by wavy lines, and the idea of water is emphasized by carving on this a crocodile, swans and lotuses. Some of the lotuses are shown in side view, while others are depicted as if one was looking down on them. The artists seem to have found no discrepancy in this. Depth and perspective are completely ignored.

All the panels are not carved in this archaic manner. Some are more advanced, as, for instance, the pancl on Plate 5 showing the Buddha returning to his home town of Kapilavastu after obtaining Enlightenment. To help identify the town as the Buddha's birthplace we have a depiction, at the very top of the panel, of the divine conception of the Buddha. We see queen Maya asleep on her couch, and her vision of an elephant entering her womb. By contrast with the Kasyapa panel, we find here a complex arrangement of figures, with a distinct three-dimensional effect. The rider at the top of the panel emerges from behind a building, and the banner he holds sweeps out and interrupts the railing-band above. The central portion again shows overlapping figures and the umbrella

held over the horse (indicating the Buddha's presence) is carved quite distinctly in front of the railing above. The elephant to the left is shown emerging from behind the building, and its ear is carved clearly in front of the structure. Depth is successfully shown, and it would appear that the craftsmen responsible for carving this panel, which is on the same gateway as the Kasyapa panel, had adjusted better to the medium of hard stone.

It seems likely that the entire process of enlarging and decorating the Sanchi *stupa* took a quarter of a century from approximately B.C. 50 to B.C. 25. Possibly, the progress in carving from the Kasyapa panel to the Kapilavastu panel is indicative of a time gap of some 20 years. It

Kasyapa panel on the East gateway of the Sanchi Stupa. Note the flat depiction with no attempt at any three-dimensional effect. [*Plate* 4]

The Kapilavastu panel on the East gateway of the Sanchi Stupa. Here depth is better depicted. [*Plate* 5]

appears that the decoration of the Sanchi *stupa* was the result of common collective effort 2000 years ago.

This we surmise from the large number of inscriptions carved on the railings and gateways of the Sanchi *stupa*. They are engraved in the early Indian script known as Brahmi, and all are records of donations. The inscriptions are brief : they give the name of the donor, his occupation, and the town to which he belonged. From them we find that the decoration of the Sanchi *stupa* was made possible by contributions from the common man—the merchant, the trader, the householder and the labourer. It was these people who donated the individual pillars of the railing, the bars that connect these pillars, sections of the top of the railing, and portions of the carvings on the gateways. [Plates 4 and 5].

Sanchi is one well-preserved example of a *stupa* belonging to the first century B.C. Explorations all over India are bringing to light more remains of the ancient period--at Bodh Gaya, at Nagpur, at Amaravati in Andhra Pradesh, at Mathura and in Rajasthan. It appears that in the first century B.C., India was dotted with *stupas* decorated with sculptures depicting the story of the Buddha. Stone was being used on a large scale for the first time. And it seems too that all these monuments were constructed and decorated, not through grants from the kings and the nobles, but through the generosity of people like you and me.

2

Excavating into a Mountainside : The Buddhist Caves of Ajanta

THE YEAR IS A.D. 480. We stand contemplating a beautiful ravine -a sweep of curved rock-surface surrounded by greenery, and with paths leading down to the stream flowing across the valley. We are at the site of a Buddhist rock-cut monastery known by the name of Ajanta. Twenty years ago, in A.D. 460, hardly anyone visited this quiet spot which had only two Buddhist chapels and a few residential halls for a small group of monks. The monastery in this form had been in existence for around 500 years. Today, in A.D. 480, the early rays of the sun filtering through the morning mist reveal a scene humming with activity. Ajanta has now grown into an extensive monastery. The numbers of the monks have increased, and the morning air is filled with the sound of chants from the chapels. Groups of artisans with pick and chisel, and painters mixing colours, are busily active, getting ready to start their day's work. The monastic caves at Ajanta are being adorned with sculptures, and their walls covered with paintings illustrating the Buddhist legend. Word has spread about the monastery at Ajanta and the magnificent work that is being done to decorate its numerous caves. Ajanta lies in the Vakataka empire, close to a major trade route cutting across the country from east to west. Wealthy merchants and traders moving along this route have begun to break journey at Ajanta. They contribute in various ways towards the decoration and expansion of the monastery, thus hoping to gain spiritual merit as well as success in their enterprise.

Nagapala and Suvarnadatta are merchants who have arrived at Ajanta late the night before, after many long days of tedious travel. They are exchanging notes with each other.

Nagapala : I have heard that since the emperor Harishena came into power 15 years ago, grand plans have been made for Ajanta.

Suvarnadatta : Yes. And it is all the more remarkable since the emperor himself is not a Buddhist. But he is truly magnanimous and he has approved and encouraged the great art project at Ajanta.

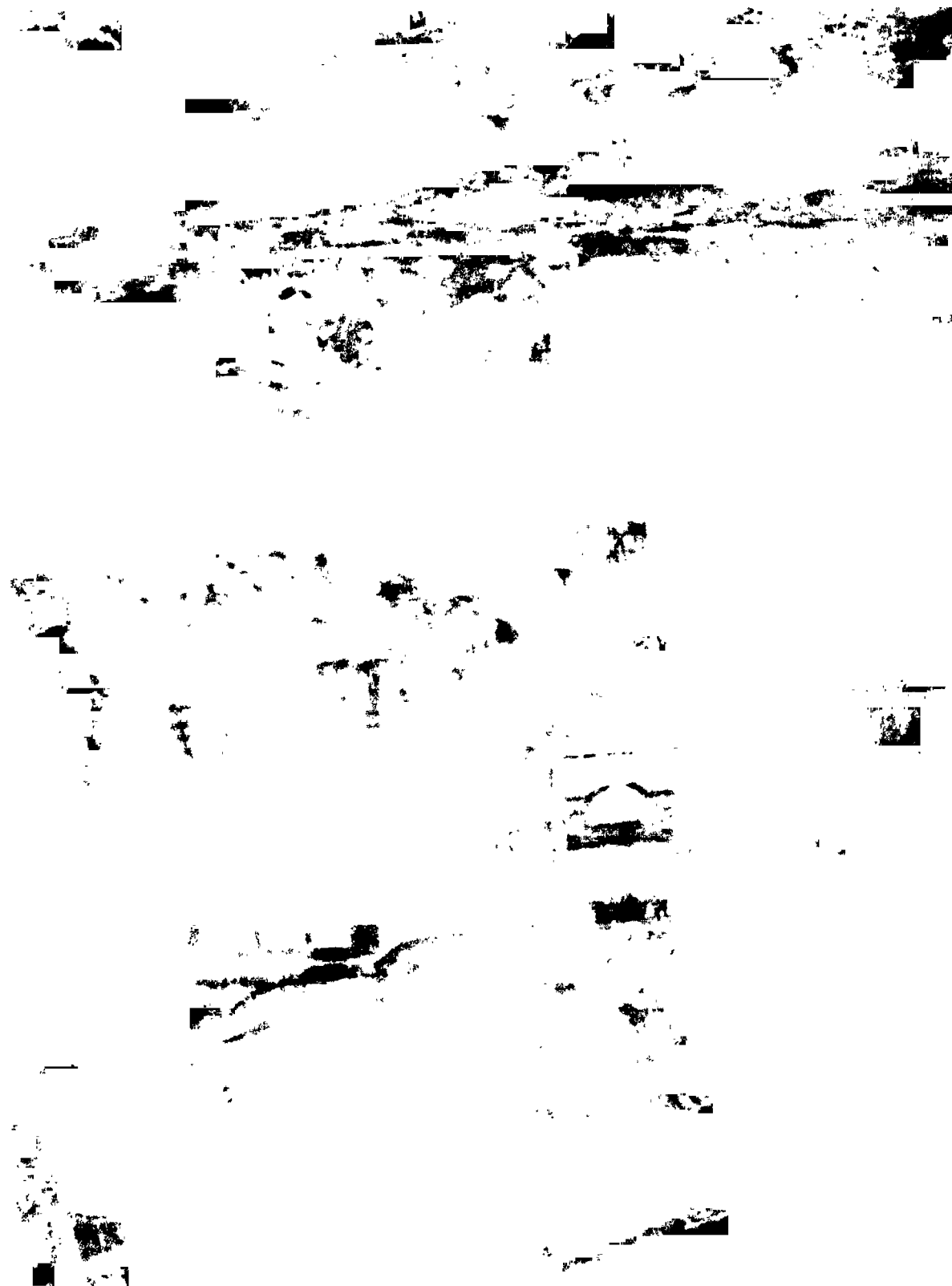
Nagapala : I have heard too that the monastery is to be the first to have its walls completely covered with paintings.

Suvarnadatta : I believe that master painters from far distant places have come to Ajanta to contribute their best work to adorning the monastery. The painters are working together with the sculptors to create the ultimate effect.

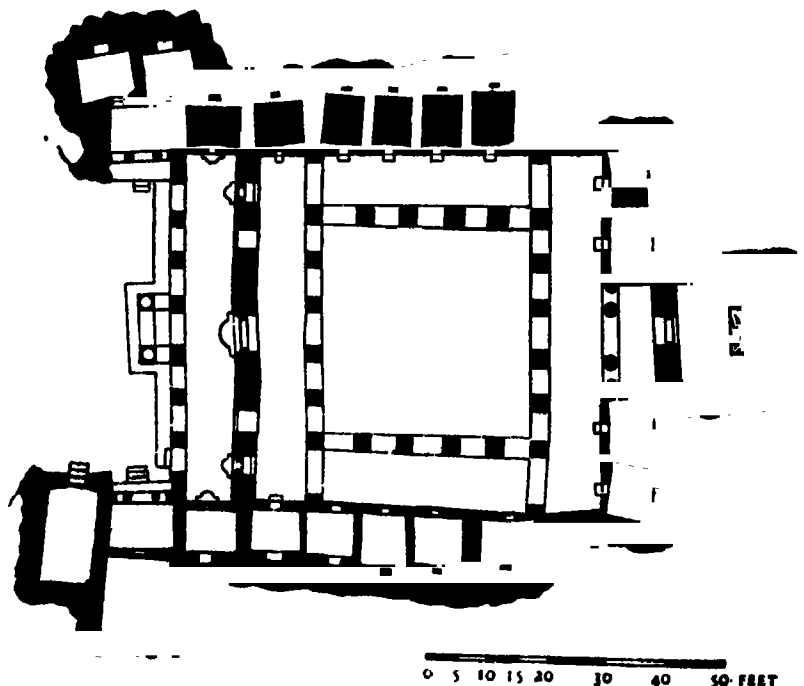
Nagapala : I am told that the royal courtiers and nobles, and even the ministers are making contributions for this purpose. Do you think they will be interested in donations from simple merchants like you and me?

Suvarnadatta : Why not ? After all, money is money. We may not be able to donate entire caves like those worthies, but it is certainly my ambition to have a beautiful scene painted, in my name, in one of the caves.

All around is a bustle of activity and the air resounds with the crack of pick and hammer against hard rock. Nagapala and Suvarnadatta stop to watch a set of new caves that have just been commenced. A rough outline has been marked on the rock and the cutting has started. The merchants note with interest that the excavation starts from the top, proceeding downwards. 'It makes sense', remarks Nagapala. 'This way there is no need for scaffolding until much later'. The merchants watch a little longer as the stone cutters start blocking out a pillar. They observe one cutter taking elaborate measurements and from time to time consulting a detailed plan. This must be the plan drawn up by the master

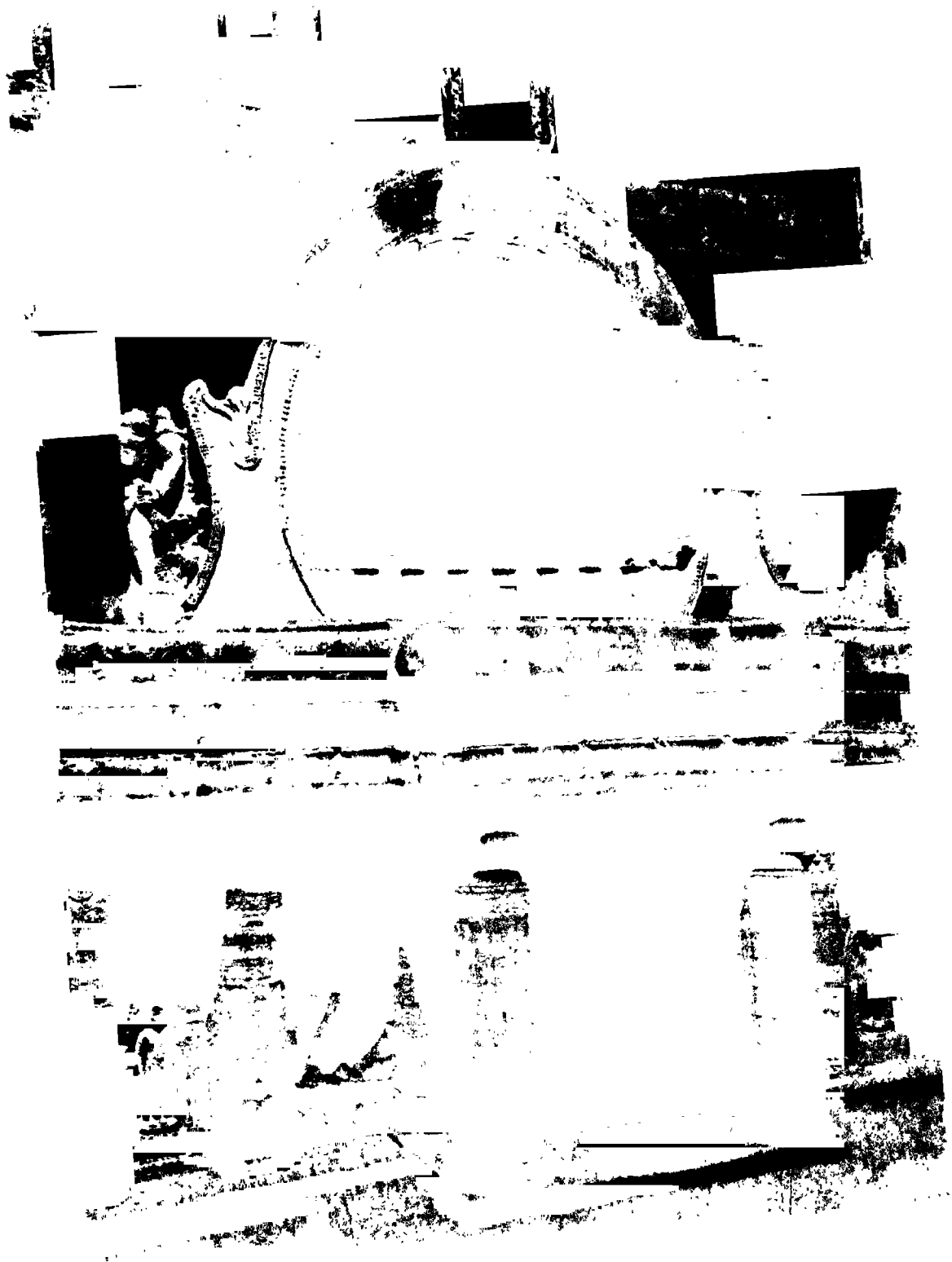
View of the rock scarp at Ajanta, showing four of the thirty monastic caves at the site *[Plate 6, pp. 14–15]*

architect. 'Do you notice', says Suvarnadatta, 'that the stone cutters and sculptors work almost hand in hand ? Look ! Here is a sculptor completing the decoration of a pillar on the verandah, while the inside is still just being blocked out !'

Nagapala and Suvarnadatta walk into some of the completed *viharas,* the residential halls for the monks. At Ajanta all these halls are so planned as to include a shrine at the far end. The *viharas* are of different sizes, they notice, but all are built on very similar lines. There is a pillared verandah in front, from which three doors and two windows lead into the main hall. The side walls of this hall have doors opening into 15 to 20 small bare cells for the monks to live in. The central area of the hall contains a colonnade of 20 pillars which creates a large central square space with aisles all around. In the centre of the rear wall is a doorway leading into a shrine chamber containing a large rock-cut image of the Buddha. The door jambs are adorned with floral carving, and most of them also have exquisitely sculptured female figures alongside. The rock-cut Buddha image contained within each shrine is of impressive proportions, and the calm, self-absorbed expression on the face of the figures is most inspiring.

Floor Plan of a typical vihara at Ajanta. [*Plate 7*]

Nagapala and Suvarnadatta walk on to one of the *chaityas* (chapels) from which the sound of chanting is just dying away. The entire facade of this *chaitya* is beautifully decorated with sculptured images, and light enters the interior through a magnificent horse-shoe-shaped window. On either side of the little pillared porch leading to the interior are two standing Buddha figures in a relaxed pose. Suvarnadatta notices that the images appear to be facing him as he enters the *chaitya*. Their benign expressions seem to create in him a feeling of calm, and of renewed faith and reassurance. The interior has an inverted U-shaped end, with decorated pillars that follow this apsidal shape of the *chaitya*.

The two merchants first walk around the *pradakshina* path created by the pillars, and then into the central aisle to kneel in front of the *stupa* at the far end. This is the age-old plan and pattern of worship of the Buddhist chapel, established over 500 years ago. But in the earlier *chaityas*, the object of worship was a plain, undecorated *stupa* that represented the Buddha. At that early stage the human figure of the Buddha was never represented in painting and sculpture; his presence was indicated instead by a symbol. Now Buddhism had evolved into a more popular form known as Mahayana. The Buddha had been made into God, and the human figure of the Buddha had been introduced into art, mostly replacing the symbol. But, in the *chaitya*, the monastic authorities evidently did not feel it justified to give up the established form of the *stupa* as the object of worship. At the same time they wished to introduce a figure of the Buddha. This they achieved by making the *stupa* into an imposing structure with an ornamental niche in front within which they sculpted a standing image of the Buddha.

The merchants leave the chapel and walk a little farther, stopping at a cave where the walls are being prepared for painting. The stone masons have left the walls of the cave rough and uneven since this provides a good grip for the plaster laid on it. On one side. two men are busy preparing the plaster which consists of mud to which sand, rice husk and straw are being added. Two layers of this plaster are laid against the wall, the first layer containing the coarser material, and the second layer being ground smoother.

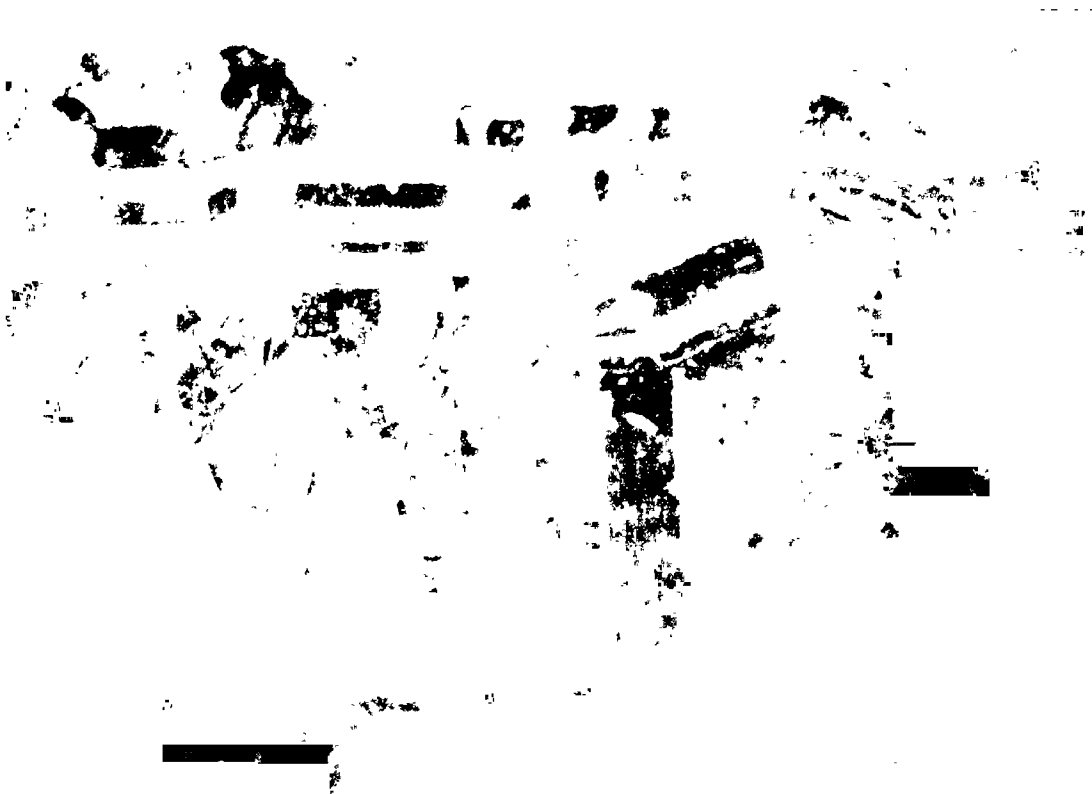
'Do you paint directly on this?', Nagapala asks one of the workmen. 'We shall apply a layer of limewash over the plaster to further smooth the

←*Frontage of Chaitya 19 at Ajanta.* [*Plate 8*]

Interior of Chaitya 19 at Ajanta. Note the stupa with a Buddha image superimposed on it. [*Plate 9*]

surface, and on this the colours will be applied. Look towards the far end wall. You can see the painters at work'.

The two merchants walk over. Small hollows have been scooped into the floor and in these the colours are being prepared. Red and yellow are made from local red and yellow ochres. White is being powdered from kaolin and lime, while black is just lamp black. Green is from another locally available mineral rock. To one side is a small pot of blue colour. This, they are told, is the precious and expensive imported lapis lazuli.

One of the artists tells them that the painting of the entire end wall has been commissioned by a wealthy patron. He has asked them to cover the wall with scenes from the Mahajanaka Jataka, which is his favourite among the stories of the previous lives of the Buddha. In many details, the Buddha's life as prince Mahajanaka is similar to that of his historic life as prince Siddhartha. Half the wall is complete, and Nagapala and

Painted wall in an Ajanta vihara, depicting scenes from the Mahajanaka Jataka. [*Plate 10*]

Suvarnadatta stand gazing at an exquisite depiction of Mahajanaka surrounded by the ladies of the court. [Plate 10]

Immediately next to it is the scene of Mahajanaka leaving the palace on horse-back in search of a deeper meaning to life. The merchants stand admiring the fine brush strokes, the delicate shading and the beautiful colours. The scenes are crowded with people and generally women seem to outnumber the men. The women are depicted in eye-catching poses and are dressed in translucent clothes. Emphasis is on eyes, lips, fingers, and then on the large rounded breasts and the slim waist. Suvarnadatta notices a scene on a side wall depicting a lady at her toilet. It has been finished down to the waist by the master painter, who is now giving instructions for its completion to his apprentices.

'If you are really interested in the paintings, you should go over and look at Devadatta's cave', remarks the painters' assistant. as he proceeds to powder the colours. 'Is that a very special one?' 'Yes, indeed! The paintings of the whole cave have been carefully planned, and on either side of the doorway leading to the Buddha image in the shrine are two magnificent depictions of bodhisattvas. I heard the master painters discussing the setting. They thought that since the bodhisattva is an intermediary between man and the Buddha, the two giant-sized paintings in such a location would prepare the worshipper for finally bowing in worship before the Buddha in the shrine. 'Why don't you walk across and have a look? The paintings are having the finishing touches put to them.'

Nagapala and Suvarnadatta locate the cave easily by the crowd forming outside it. Inside, there are oil lamps everywhere, and by the flickering light of the many lamps they are able to see the paintings of the two divine bodhisattvas. To one side of the shrine doorway is the towering figure of a bodhisattva dressed in princely attire, with imposing head-gear, and wearing abundant jewellery. To the other side is the graceful image of Padmapani. Both the figures are enormously larger than the attendant figures. Nagapala nods his head in approval of this principle, by which the main figure of a composition is depicted on a larger scale than the surrounding figures. Padmapani's face is a perfect oval, the brows curve like an Indian bow, and his eyes are like lotuses. [Plate II]

'Look at the pose of the body', whispers one admiring observer. 'How well it captures a feeling of swaying grace and movement.' 'Yes',

Painting in Cave 1 at Ajanta depicting the bodhisattva Padmapani. Note how the figure of Padmapani is painted much larger than surrounding images. [*Plate 11*]

whispers his companion. 'And look at the exquisite tilt of the head and the sensitive gesture of the fingers. Isn't it perfect?'

Suddenly there is a lot of excitement and commotion. Chariots and horses are to be seen. Word passes round that two of the Emperor's trusted nobles are here. They have come to inspect the magnificent caves that they have commissioned. The two nobles are dressed in silken robes and are adorned with flowers and jewellery. They stroll down towards their two caves that are located next to each other. The caves are in the final stages of completion.

Varahadeva (the Emperor's chief minister)
: I have got the royal poet to draw up my family tree in verse, and I'm going to have this inscribed on the walls of my cave. Wouldn't you like to do the same?

Somadeva : That is indeed a splendid idea. I also want to have something written about the vast amount of money I have spent on the decoration. How shall I put it? I think I shall have it written in my cave that the cost is so high that the poor cannot even imagine it.

Varahadeva : That is a fine phrase. I am having my cave described as resembling the palace of the lord of gods. And the poet has added a fine touch. He suggested describing it as clothed in the brilliance of Indra's crown.

It is early morning at Ajanta 15 years later: the year is A.D. 495. The bustling activity of 15 years ago has been replaced by an uneasy silence, broken by hurried conferences and whispered rumours. The emperor Harishena is dead and his son has proved unable to maintain control over the empire. The adjacent Asmaka rulers have been strengthening their already well-equipped army, and the word is going round that they are about to invade and take over the Vakataka empire. At Ajanta, as elsewhere in Vakataka territory, there are rumours of defeat and concern for the future. A sense almost of doom seems to be hanging over the site. There are very few craftsmen around, and those that are there seem to have lost interest in their handiwork. The inspired and artistic paintings of 15 years ago are gone. In their place are repetitive depictions of Buddha images, wall after wall being covered with these.

A.D. 500. Work at Ajanta has come to a standstill. Only the monks still remain at the monastery. Often, after the morning ritual, they go around the incomplete caves, gazing sadly at the unfinished paintings, the half-plastered walls, and the half-carved doorways.

Work on the 30 Buddhist caves at Ajanta was over in a remarkably short period, and the end of artistic activity there was both abrupt and final. The caves were never worked on again.

A.D. 1819. Two British officers stationed at Aurangabad are out on their horses exploring the area. About 40 miles from Aurangabad they come to a beautiful ravine—a sweep of curved rock-surface completely overgrown with greenery, and with a clear stream flowing below. They ride down to the stream to water their ponies. One of them, glancing around, seems to discern a path leading upwards. Deciding to explore, he vanishes into the greenery. A little while later, his companion hears an excited shout, and the officer comes scrambling down the slope calling out incoherently about caves with sculptures and paintings. Ajanta is rediscovered.

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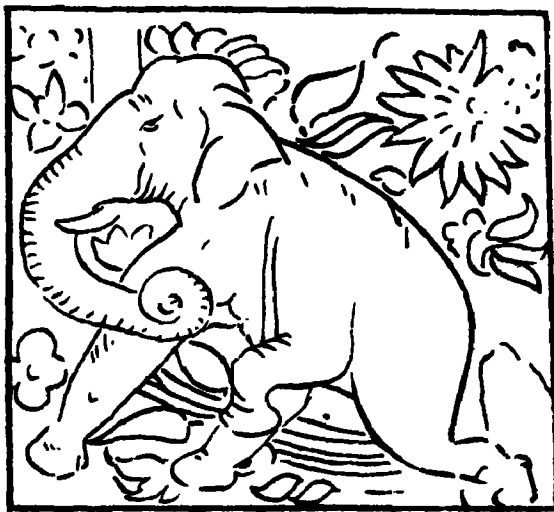

Rock-Excavation Continues : Hindu Caves at Elephanta and Ellora

AROUND A.D. 500, with the rapid rise to power of the Kalachuri dynasty, we find the Hindus for the first time using stone as the medium of their art. These monuments are not just of stone piled upon stone, but rather stone hewn out of a mountainside. The desire for permanence must have been one of the reasons for the change from brick and wood to stone, and that too the solid, immovable rock of a mountainside. An inscription in one of the rock-cut caves expresses this feeling when the donor claims the construction of a structure that will last a *kalpa,* or a cosmic era. The Kalachuri rulers were ardent worshippers of Siva and one of their greatest monuments is the famous cave on Elephanta island, just off Bombay.

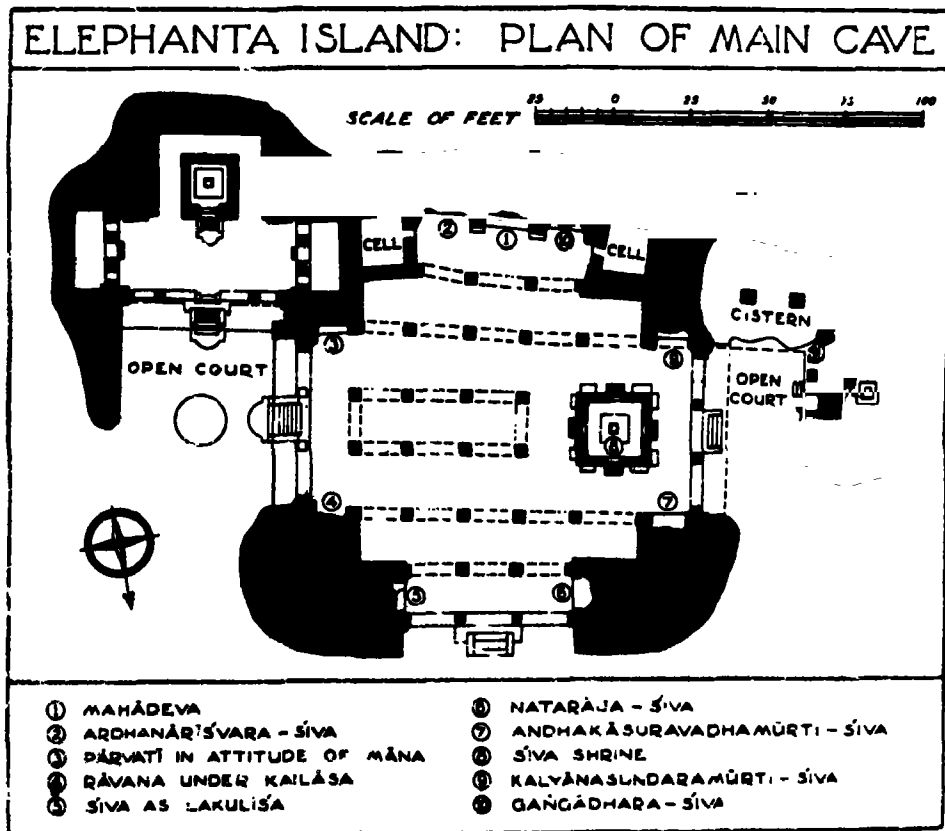
Around A.D. 500, the Vakataka empire suddenly crumbled, and the hundreds of craftsmen who had worked on the decoration of the extensive Buddhist monastery at Ajanta suddenly found themselves out of work. These craftsmen had been specially trained in the art of creating elaborate rock-cut structures out of a mountainside. In a period of political instability even work on standard structural monuments such as houses and palaces must have been difficult to find. Attracted by the stabler economic and political situation of the Bombay region under Kalachuri rule, some of the craftsmen from the Ajanta area migrated towards the west coast. Many of these craftsmen must have been

Hindus, despite the fact that they had worked on the decoration of the Buddhist monastery at Ajanta. Under Kalachuri patronage they easily adjusted their architectural and sculptural forms to the requirements of their own religion.

Throughout western India, the Buddhists had already established numerous rock-cut monasteries with *chaityas* for worship as well as a number of residential caves for the monks to live in. From B.C. 250 onwards the Buddhists were constructing *stupas* and rock monasteries and adorning these with stone sculptures. The peak of Buddhist rock-cutting had been reached in the caves at Ajanta with their magnificent sculpted and painted decoration. It is a strange and somewhat unexpected fact that the earliest major monuments of Hindu art date from as late as A.D. 500, while the religion itself may be traced back to B.C. 1200. All art in stone that has survived in India prior to A.D. 500 was devoted to Buddhism. Monuments to the Hindu religion too must have been erected throughout these centuries by devout Hindus. Presumably, these were all in some perishable medium such as mud, brick, thatch and bamboo so that none of them has survived to the present day. It seems to have been only the Buddhists who very early adopted the permanent medium of stone as the medium of their religious and artistic expression.

Both the Buddhist and Hindu rock-cut sites were monastic establishments located in isolated places. But there is one feature that distinguishes the two. Residential halls for the monks form an essential part of a Buddhist site, while this feature of providing rock-cut accommodation is abandoned in Hindu cave sites. Thus, of the 30 caves at the Buddhist monastery of Ajanta, only four are chapels exclusively for worship, while the remaining caves are residential and contain small rock-cut cells for the monks to live in. By contrast, all Hindu caves are for worship only and none of them is intended to be residential. It would seem that the Hindus built the rather mundane cells of their ascetics out of mud, thatch and brick, in the vicinity of their rock-cut temples.

The cave temple on Elephanta island is cut from a chocolate-brown fine-grained sandstone, a material that can be carved with precision and detail. All the Buddhist caves constructed so far had a single entrance in the front so that the interior remained rather dark. At Elephanta we now have the introduction of a new plan and three great pillared

entrances allow light to flood into the pillared interior. The shrine, which contains a *Sivalinga,* also has entrances on all four sides so that light enters the very interior of the sanctum. These four entrances are flanked by huge sculpted doorkeepers. Although this type of rock-cutting is referred to as rock architecture, it is more truly sculpture on a gigantic scale. Following a carefully drawn-up plan, vast quantities of rock are scooped out of the mountainside to result in the basic lay-out of the caves. We see pillars and arches and entrances, but none of these involve any constructional principles. Although modelled on structural buildings, the columns of the rock-cut caves do not actually support the roof, nor do the arches carry any weight.

Floor Plan of Cave I at Elephanta. Note the three separate entrances that allow light to enter the interior from different directions. [*Plate 12*]

The Hindus specialised in the sculptural decoration of their caves and this they carried to great heights. The Elephanta cave contains ten enormous and spectacular carvings of the legend of Siva. The panels are placed in deep niches and are arranged around the main hall according to a carefully-thought-out scheme.

Most awe-inspiring of all is a gigantic carving of a Saivite Trinity, located at the end of the cave, opposite the north entrance to the temple. [Plate 13] This triple conception presents Tatpurusha or the Supreme form of Siva as the central of the three faces. To the left in profile is the skull-crowned head of Aghora-Bhairava, or Siva in his form of

Close-up of Saiva Trinity in Cave 1 at Elephanta. [*Plate 13*]

Destroyer. Balancing it on the right is the face of Parvati, the beautiful wife of Siva. The heads emerge from the rock within a box-like niche, ten-and-a-half feet deep. The head and shoulders rise to a height of almost 18 feet above a moulded base that is itself three feet high. Like the doorways of the main shrine, the Trinity too is flanked by guardians measuring 13 feet in height. The breadth of the shoulders belongs to the central face. It is hemmed in by hands, one raised (damaged), and the other resting on the base holding a fruit. The sculptor has conceived and carved the whole so skilfully that the shoulders also belong to the faces in profile. These shoulders are turned against the side faces so that the hands rest on the backs of the shoulders. The hand on the left, bel nging to the wrathful face, has a snake emerging from between the fingers. Skulls and serpents are to be seen in the headdress and the earring too is a snake. The hand on the right belonging to the blissful face holds a lotus flower. The full lips of the faces are carved in accordance with the ancient ideal of beauty which maintained that the lips should have the fullness of a mango. The three gigantic heads convey perfectly the impassiveness and serenity of the Supreme form of Siva, the scowling mood of the angry Aghora-Bhairava, and the youth and peace of the face of Parvati.

The subsidiary sculptures in the cave are all dedicated to a significant aspect of Siva. These sculptures are each on a magnificent scale, some 15 to 18 feet high, and may be called subsidiary only by comparison with the Trinity. Among the most outstanding panels is an exquisite depiction of Siva as Ardhanari or Half-Woman. [Plate 14] The right half of the figure represents Parvati and has its wide hip and full breast emphasized. One of her hands holds up a mirror. The left side represents Siva and is straight-bodied with one hand resting on the bull Nandi. Surrounding the figure are various gods, each on their characteristic animal mounts, and above them are to be seen flying gandharvas and apsaras. Another masterly panel depicts the marriage of Siva and Parvati. A third depicts Siva as Gangadhara, or He who upheld the river Ganga. Yet another depicts Siva in an aggressive mood destroying the demon Andhaka.

Unfortunately, all these panels are in a partially ruined condition due to the ruthless desecration of the cave by the Portuguese in the sixteenth century. It seems that the commander of the military garrison stationed on

Siva as Ardhanari, or Half-woman, from the Elephanta cave. The left half represents Siva with one hand resting on his bull Nandi, and the right half depicts Parvati. [*Plate 14*]

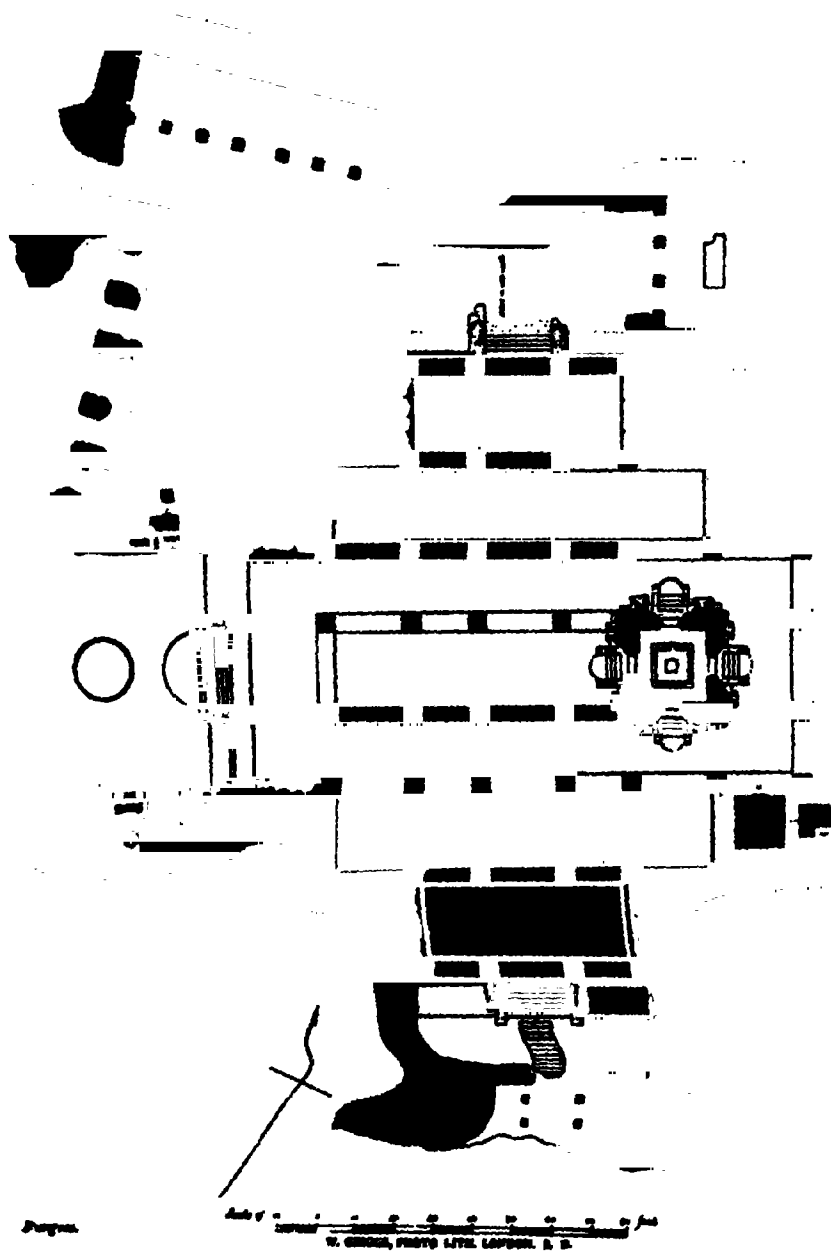
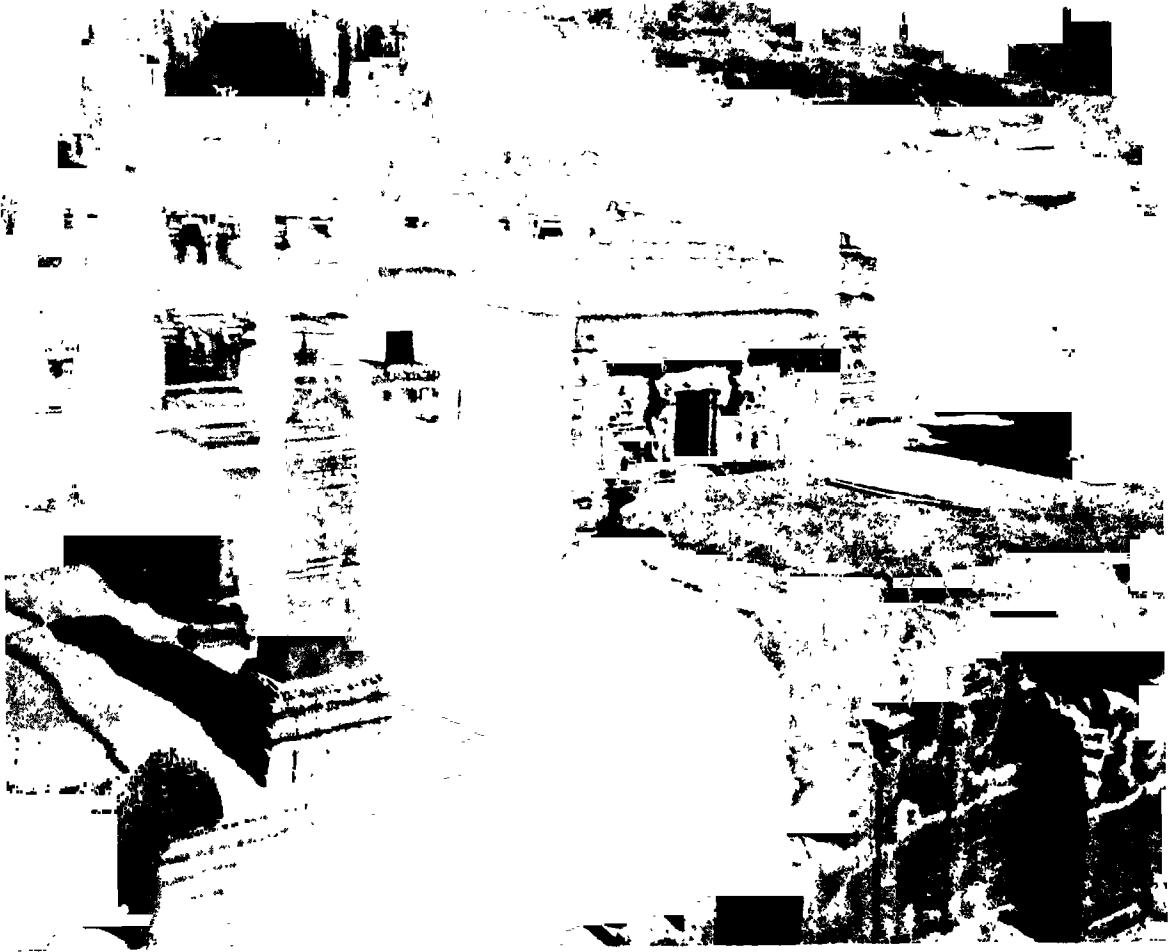
the island amused himself by having artillery practice down the corridors of the hall. The result is that nearly all of the great sculptured panels are thoroughly smashed from the waist down.

By about A.D 550, excavating activity gradually declined in the Bombay region and Kalachuri patronage shifted towards Ellora. Some of the

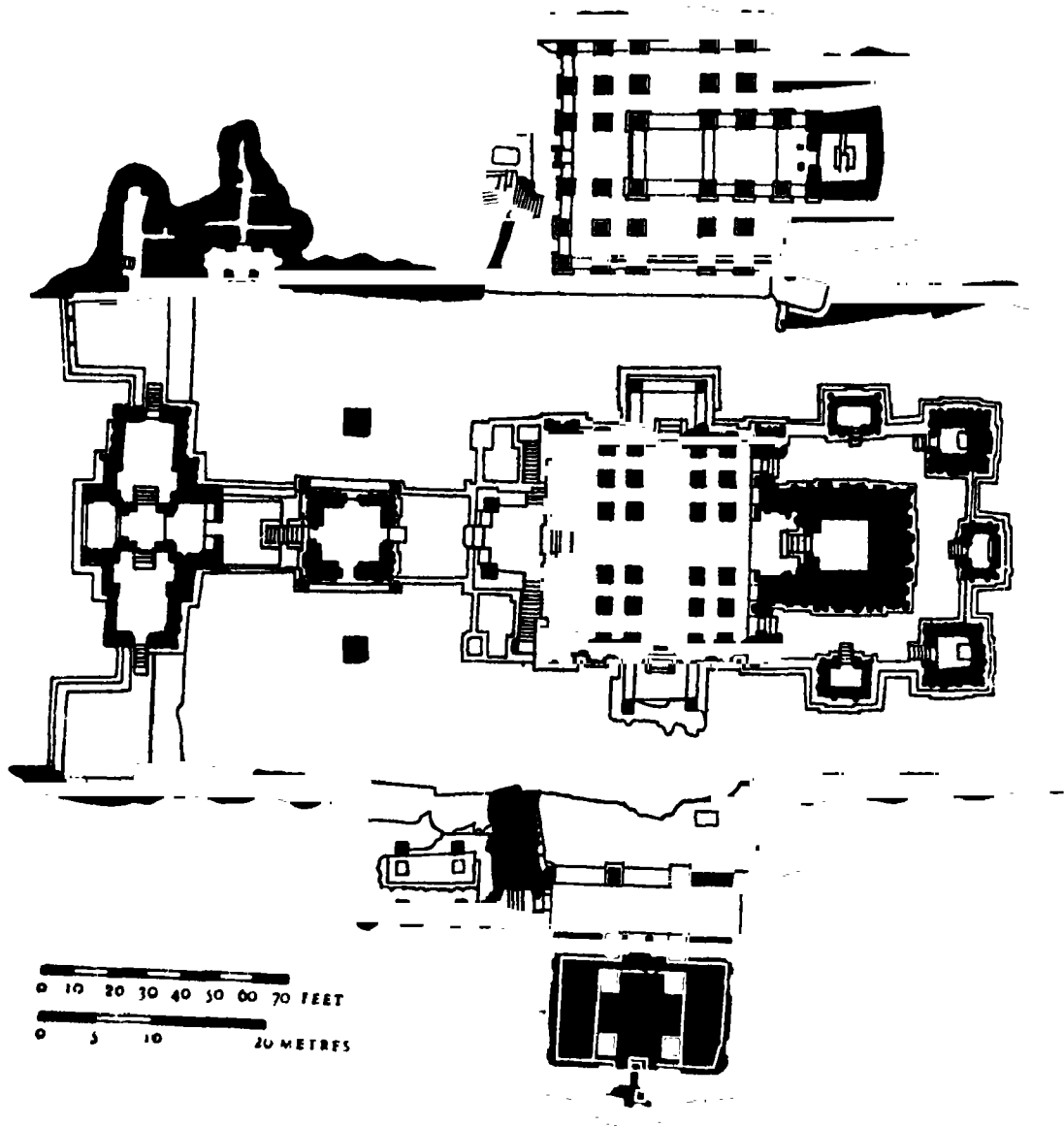
same hereditary craftsmen who had come from the Ajanta region towards the west coast a generation or two before, now appear to have moved back to their original homeland. Starting around A.D. 550, we find splendid Hindu caves being cut at Ellora. These are modelled in many respects on the plan established at Elephanta, but certain adjustments and improvements have been introduced to give them maturity.

One splendid example is the Dhumar Lena cave (cave 29) which, unlike Elephanta, is now bilaterally symmetrical. [Plate 15] The focal point of the temple is a massive central shrine with doorways on each of its four sides, flanked by gigantic doorkeepers and female attendants. The shrine is contained within a group of halls, so arranged as to form a cross in plan. Leading up to the shrine, and partly enclosing it, is the main hall—a gallery 150 feet long and 50 feet wide, with a row of five pillars on each side. Flanking the main hall on each side are the side wings, which are pillared courts, leading to the two side entrances. The entire width across the temple between the side entrances measures the same as its depth—150 feet—and the effect is one of pillared arcades from all three entrances converging on to the shrine. The pillars are of stupendous proportions being five feet wide at the base and 15 feet high. Much of the impressive architectural effect of the interior is due to the system of lighting, which being admitted from three different directions, enters into every part of the interior and casts intricate shadows throughout. The various walls of the cave contain large sculptured scenes describing the legend of Siva. The Dhumar Lena impresses by its sheer massiveness and also by the enormity of its sculptured panels.

Ellora reached the real peak of its glory however, in its final phase of excavation under the Rashtrakuta rulers in the eighth century. At this time some truly magnificent Hindu caves were carved- caves which, according to contemporary inscription, struck wonder into even the gods. The climax of this Rashtrakuta rock architecture is to be found in the Kailasa temple at Ellora. [Plate 16] This structure was due to the patronage of Krishna I of the Rashtrakuta dynasty who ruled from A.D. 757 to A.D. 783, at a time when the dynasty was at the height of its power.

A first view of the Kailasa temple is apt to leave one breathless with astonishment; unfortunately, the camera is unable to capture the grandeur in its entirety. The whole temple has been quarried out of the

Floor Plan of the Dhumar Lena cave at Ellora. While modelled on Elephanta, the plan of Dhumar Lena is more clearly logical. [Plate 15]

The Kailasa temple at Ellora, entirely quarried out of the rock of the hillside. [*Plate 16*]

hillside. The first stage of the work, although laborious, was simple. It consisted in excavating out of the hillside four huge trenches at right angles to form a rectangle 300 feet by 175 feet. This outlined the shape of the courtyard and left standing in the middle a large mass of rock over 200 feet long and 100 feet wide. From this mass the temple itself was carved. Beginning from the top, the process of roughly hewing this mass into shape now began. The stone masons seem to have been followed immediately by the sculptors who completed each portion of the carved detail as the work progressed downwards, thus avoiding the need for scaffolding.

The process must have been most complex. Masses of rock had to be left intact, not just for the various levels of the temple itself, but also

Floor Plan of the Kailasa temple at Ellora. [*Plate 17*]

for various additional structures including the two free-standing pillars on the floor of the courtyard as well as the large rock-cut animals. The temple is certainly a stupendous piece of work. It has one main disadvantage: to some extent it is left at the bottom of a deep quarry. The architects tried to compensate for this by placing the entire temple on a tall base which is 25 feet high.

The scheme of the Kailasa resolves itself into four parts: the body of the temple itself; the entrance gateway; an intermediary shrine for Siva's bull Nandi; and the pillared caves cut into the walls of the surrounding quarry. The lofty substantial base on which the temple is carved has, at first sight, the appearance of a ground storey. The deeply carved panels of this base are one of the most striking features of the temple. They consist of lions and elephants that appear to be effortlessly supporting the temple on their backs. The temple proper consists of a shrine preceded by a spacious pillared hall, with further pillared halls extending as wings to the east and west, giving the temple a roughly cross-like plan.

Around the sanctum are carved five subsidiary shrines. Over the whole rises the stately shrine tower in three levels, reaching up to a total height of 95 feet. Each of the five subsidiary shrines repeats this theme on a reduced scale. The various architectural elements have all been assembled in an orderly and artistic manner to form a unified whole. The Nandi shrine reaches up to a height of 50 feet and is a pavilion 20 feet square. It too stands on a high decorated base in order to bring it to a level with the rest of the temple to which it is connected with a bridge. On the opposite side the Nandi shrine is joined by another bridge to the main entrance which is a double-storied gatehouse. The exterior walls of all these structures are decorated in a similar manner, with niches enclosing statues of various gods. On each side of the Nandi shrine is a somewhat sturdy free-standing pillar, 51 feet high. The walls of the Kailasa temple are entirely covered with scenes from Saiva mythology and from the Ramayana. One of the most dramatic of a number of scenes, all carved on a monumental scale, is to be seen in Plate 18: it depicts Ravana attempting to shake Mount Kailasa. What we see here is a new type of relief composition in which some of the figures are carved completely in the round, and in which the whole action takes place within a deep box. Space and light and

shade have been skilfully used in the composition. This is an illustration of an episode from the Ramayana in which Ravana tries to uproot Mount Kailasa to use it as a kind of magic weapon in his war against Rama. Many-headed Ravana is depicted with multiple arms spread out like the spokes of a wheel, and their arrangement gives an indication of the enormous pressure he is exerting against Siva's mountain home. In the upper part of the composition we see Siva seated in an elegant pose. His outstretched foot, barely touching the ground, imprisons Ravana below the mountain. Parvati, somewhat alarmed, clutches Siva's arm as she feels the mountain quake, and a frightened maid is seen in the background.

There are a vast number of sculptured panels, depicting every major legend from the mythology of Siva and from the Ramayana, but they are, of course, too numerous to describe in any detail. The panel discussed above gives a good idea of the size and the effectiveness of these compositions.

It appears that originally certain portions of the temple were painted, since a few traces of this painting are still to be seen. A further indication of its painted condition is obtained from the fact that when the Muslims conquered the area at the beginning of the sixteenth century, they described the Kailasa as Rang Mahal or Coloured Palace.

The Kailasa temple at Ellora is one of the last examples, and probably the greatest, of the rock-cut architecture of India. With this achievement the sculptors seem to have felt that the highest peak had been reached. A contemporary inscription tells us that the Hindu gods rode in their celestial cars over the temple and were struck with wonder by it. Another inscription tells us that the architect of the Kailasa, on seeing the finished temple, was himself astounded and exclaimed 'Was it indeed I who built this?' By the tenth century A.D. the rock-cut movement ceased in India. Temples were no longer hewn out of solid rock, but were now erected solely by piling up stone upon stone. Thus ended a phase of rock architecture started by the Buddhists in B.C. 250 and developed to magnificent proportions by the Hindus between the sixth and tenth centuries A.D.

← Ravana attempting to shake Mount Kailasa, from the Kailasa temple at Ellora. Notice the deep cutting resulting in a great play of light and shade [Plate 18]

4

Greek Influence on Buddhist Art

At a time when the study of Indian art was in its infancy, and when all art was judged by European standards, the Greek-inspired art of north-west India was thought to be the finest school of Indian art, a school that produced works of grace and realism. Pieces such as the Buddha of Plate 19 were hailed as being among the finest works of art in India. But with rising nationalist feeling, the pendulum swung to the other extreme. The Greek-inspired sculpture began to be described, in scornful terms, as an imitation of an imitation, and the Buddha figures were labelled sapless products. Neither judgement is very fair. Although somewhat insipid and effeminate, the Greek-inspired Buddha is also smiling, handsome and dignified.

This Greek-inspired art of north-west India is known as the Gandharan school of art. It gets its name from the area known as Gandhara that comprises parts of Baluchistan, northern Pakistan and north-west India. Greek influence in this area dates from the invasion of Alexander the Great in B.C. 327. Alexander was unable to penetrate any distance into India because his army mutinied when it reached the river Beas, refusing to proceed any further. Alexander was compelled to retreat at this stage and was forced to abandon his dream of conquering India. The provinces of north-western India that had submitted to him, he left in the hands of various Indian governors. He divided his conquests in the rest of Asia into several provinces which he placed in the hands of Greek governors.

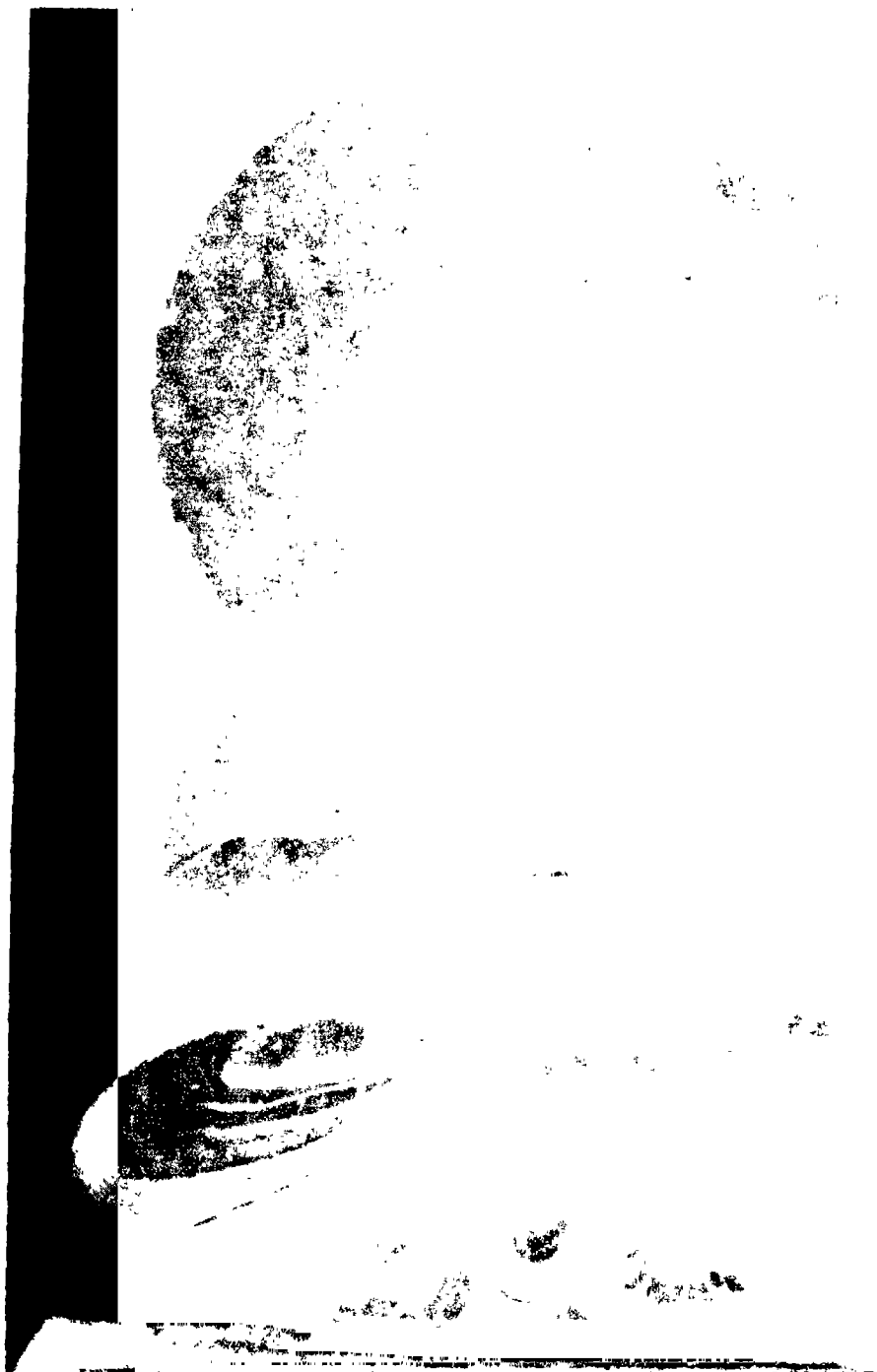
Head of Buddha from the Gandharan region showing the influence of Greek art on the Buddhist art of India. [Plate 19]

Alexander died soon after and was succeeded in the Asian part of his empire by Seleucus. The provinces of Parthia and Bactria (north-west Baluchistan) remained two important provinces of the empire of Seleucus until around B.C. 250, when they revolted and established their independence. The two kingdoms then continued to flourish under several independent Greek rulers. Excavations at various sites in Bactria reveal that these Greek kingdoms tended and nurtured Greek culture. We have tangible evidence of this in the form of Greek architectural and ornamental details, of Greek sculpture and Greek inscriptions. In Pakistan and north-west India too we have evidence of the continued rule

of Indo-Greek kingdoms, with the ruler Menander being one of the most important and famous of Indo-Greek kings.

The story of Indo-Greek art starts with the Kushans invading this Greek-occupied area, and it revolves around the Kushan realisation of the value of the Greek traditions they found in the regions they conquered. The Kushans were originally part of the nomadic tribes called the Yuehchi, who were pushed out of the Chinese province of Kansu in the second century B.C. They came to the Greek province of Bactria where they settled in B.C. 130 and became the ruling power after defeating the local Greek dynasty. The Kushans soon became closely integrated with the local people. Here they came across Greek civilisation. They learned to appreciate its value and, as the ruling power, they continued to cultivate these Greek traditions. By about B.C. 90 the Kushans moved into Pakistan and north-west India and defeated the already weak Indo-Greek kingdoms of the area. Here too they continued to build on the same Greek foundations. By the time the third Kushan ruler Kanishka came to the throne, the Kushan empire extended from Bactria to Mathura

In India the Kushans came into contact with the powerful Buddhist religion. The Hinayana Buddhism taught by the Buddha had, by this stage, given way to a more lenient, more popular faith in which the Buddha had been made into a god. The Buddha never claimed to be anything more than a human being who had found a path to salvation. But the masses who had been converted to Buddhism found that they needed an object on which to fix their devotion. And what better than to worship their founder as a divine being ? The Buddhist world in India was ready for this innovation.

The invading Kushan rulers found themselves confronted with a demand for this new element--the divine figure of the Buddha. The Kushans had the answer. Drawing on the lingering Greek traditions of Bactria, which they had learned to appreciate and preserve, they began to produce Buddha figures modelled on the style of the young and handsome Greek Apollo. Being an intelligent people with an international outlook, they recruited craftsmen from Greek Bactria, from the Persian territories and perhaps even from the Roman provinces of western Asia. Trade flourished in the Kushan empire and luxury goods including pieces of art from

Seated Buddha from the Gandharan region. [*Plate 20*]

Alexandria and Egypt, from China and India, poured into the Kushan warehouses. In such an atmosphere did the Greek-inspired art of Gandhara come into being.

The typical Gandharan head of the Buddha has adolescent features and wavy hair. [Plate 20] In this it strongly resembles the Greek Apollo. However, Indian tradition maintained that any proper likeness of the Buddha had to incorporate certain major signs of superhuman perfection that distinguished the body of the Buddha from those of ordinary mortals. These signs of physical and spiritual perfection include the mound on the top of the skull known as the *usnisa,* the tuft of hair between the eyebrows which was called the *urna,* and also the long ear-lobes. To those used to the perfection of the Greek Apollo, the mound on the skull was something strange. The *usnisa* was, therefore, disguised under the wavy, curly hair and made to look like a rather elegant hair-do. The fact that the *urna* was actually a tuft of hair between the eyebrows was not emphasized. It was depicted in such a manner that it could be taken to be a *tika* applied to the forehead.

The body proportions of the Gandharan Buddha have a ratio of five heads to the total height, exactly as in late Roman sculpture. The images are usually dressed in a robe which has deep, ridged folds—a robe exactly similar to the Roman toga. The Gandharan Buddhas are beautiful images but their beauty is largely a physical one. We would look in vain for an expression revealing calm, deep meditation.

Apart from the free-standing Buddha images, there is a large amount of narrative relief sculpture on slabs of stone. These slabs were generally placed against the surface of the many *stupas* that were constructed in the monasteries of the Gandharan region. In the early school of Buddhist art represented by the Sanchi carvings, it was usual to depict the Buddha's presence by an emblem of some sort. The introduction of the Buddha images in Gandharan sculpture enlarged the scope of the sculptor. He was now able to depict a number of scenes, such as episodes from the Buddha's childhood and youth, all of which was not possible earlier, when the figure of the Buddha was not depicted.

It is perhaps in connection with scenes of the death of the Buddha that the greatest differences are to be seen in the Gandharan as compared to the earlier schools of Buddhist art. When the Buddha was represented

Gandharan relief depicting the Death of the Buddha. [*Plate 21*]

by a symbol only, the death of the Master was shown by a *stupa*. Now the figure of the Buddha lying on a couch occupies the centre of the panel from which emerge rows of figures. Sorrow is writ large on the faces and in the actions of the mourners. The Malla chieftains—the chiefs of the area in which the Buddha died—are shown behind the Buddha's couch, and are depicted as unrestrained in their grief. The monks on either side of the Buddha's couch are shown more resigned. The artist has tried to make it appear as if the recumbent dead figure of the Buddha was in a posture of sleep and was lying relaxed on its side. However, the manner in which the lower edge of the robe has been shown stiff and rigid makes it appear like a standing image placed on its side. [Plate 21]

The mingling of east and west in Gandhara resulted in a composite art that can rarely be mistaken for a western product, but which nearly always includes recognizable western features. The imitation of western drapery is one of these factors, and the smooth rounded features of many of the faces is another such. Consider the figure of queen Maya in Plate 22. The robe she is wearing, her rounded features, her hair style all are un-Indian. The scene shows the birth of the Buddha with the infant Buddha leaping out of his mother's side as she stands under a *sal* tree. Other western features in Gandharan art include various ornamental details, such as cupids, which are sometimes startlingly western.

A vast quantity of Gandharan sculpture has been recovered. Unfortunately, however, more than half these carvings are examples of

Gandharan relief depicting the birth of the Buddha. Note the un-Indian appearance of the whole, specially of queen Maya herself. [*Plate 22*]

completely uninspired work. One of the most important reasons for the constant repetition of subjects and for the unevenness of the workmanship was the rapidly growing demand for this style of sculpture—a demand which followed the expansion of Buddhism under the patronage of the Kushans. An ever-increasing number of *stupas* and chapels came into being, and sculptured slabs and free-standing Buddha images were required to decorate these. When quantity becomes more important than quality, art of any kind, and particularly religious art, is bound to become repetitive and mechanical.

Over what period of time did Gandharan art flourish? The Greek-inspired Buddha image appears to have been introduced late in the first century A.D. We know that it had definitely come in during the reign of the third Kushan emperor Kanishka. Kanishka's coins have his own portrait on one side, and on the other, a figure of the standing Buddha with the word 'Buddha' written beside it in Greek letters. The exact date of Kanishka is not certain but it seems likely that he started to reign either in A.D. 78 or A.D. 144 or somewhere in between. We can say with some certainty that the Greek style of Buddhist sculpture came into being in the first century A.D. and then continued to flourish until the fifth century A.D. This terminal date is given by the savage invasions of the White Huns who broke in from central Asia in the latter half of the fifth century. Chinese chronicles tell us that the Hun king Mihirakula exterminated the royal family of Gandhara, massacred more than 90,000 of the population, and destroyed 1600 Buddhist monasteries. Gandharan art may have lingered on in a few odd corners, but for the most part it was blotted out by this holocaust.

5

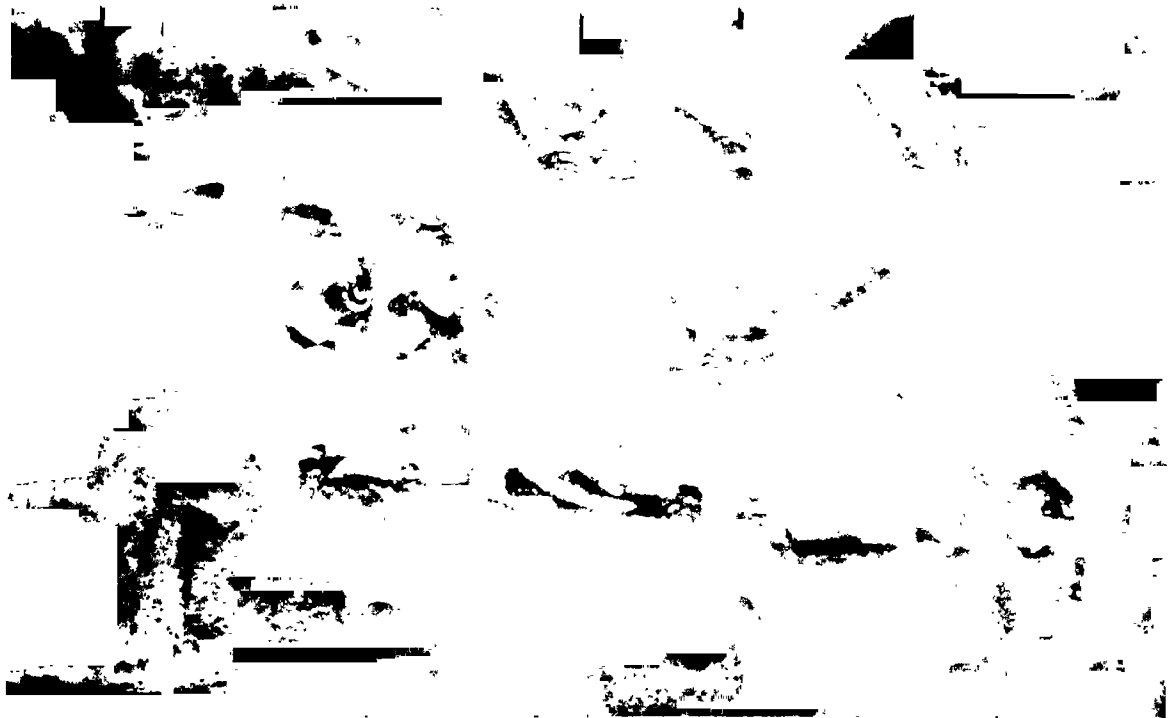
Mahabalipuram : A Riddle in Stone

SITUATED SOME 40 miles south of Madras city, Mahabalipuram is today a tiny coastal village with a population of a few hundreds. In the far-off days of the Pallava rulers, however, it appears to have been a major port, bustling with the activity of sailors who came from far and near to load and unload their cargoes. The monuments at Mahabalipuram stand on a deserted site along the seashore that is dotted with swaying casuarina trees. The drifting sands and the solitude seem to whisper of a glorious past, while the coconut vendors plying a brisk trade bring us back to today and to the riddle posed by the lonely, weathering monuments.

The problem of the date and authorship of the varied group of monuments at Mahabalipuram is an unresolved one, which is still being discussed by scholars of art. There are roughly 35 monuments, large and small, scattered around the present-day village of Mahabalipuram. The monuments are of different types and may be divided into four categories.

Firstly, we have the sculptured scenes cut into the cliff face, the most important among which is the hundred-foot by fifty-foot depiction of Arjuna's penance. Secondly, we have the rock-cut caves, one of the important ones being the Mahishamardini cave. Thirdly, we have the

Detail of Arjuna's penance, Mahabalipuram, with the natural cleft in the centre of the rock treated as the river Ganga. [Plate 23] →

View of cliff-face at Mahabalipuram roughly 100 feet by 50 feet carved with scenes depicting Arjuna's penance. [Plate 24]

Details of Arjuna's penance, Mahabalipuram, showing Siva appearing before Arjuna who is performing penance. Siva's lower left hand is in the varada mudra, the gesture of granting a wish. [*Plate 25*]

monoliths—small shrines cut out of single boulders of rock. Best known of these is a group known as the Pancha Pandava *rathas*. The last category is that of the structural temple, the most important being the Shore Temple. These various categories of monuments are scattered around Mahabalipuram with no apparent plan in their placing. Added to this is the fact that at least one half of them are unfinished. The monuments of Mahabalipuram certainly present an exciting challenge to those inclined to examine them at some length.

It is accepted by all that the monuments of Mahabalipuram are the result of artisans working under the patronage of the Pallava rulers of south India. I must give you a brief idea of the history of the period. The first major Pallava ruler was Mahendra who ruled between A.D. 580 and A.D. 630, and under whom the Pallava kingdom, with its capital at Kancheepuram, extended as far south as Tiruchchirapalli. He was succeeded by Narasimha I Mamalla who ruled from A.D. 630 to A.D. 668.

Mamalla fought several wars with the Chalukya rulers to the north-west and at one time captured and occupied the Chalukyan capital of Badami. He also sent a naval expedition to Ceylon. Mamalla fought also with various other rulers of south India, all of whom he defeated. His very name, Mamalla, Mahamalla, the Great Wrestler, the Great Warrior, is indicative of the main preoccupation of his reign. Mamallapuram, the correct name of Mahabalipuram, was obtained from the name of the ruler Mamalla, who was responsible for developing the site into a major port. It was from Mahabalipuram that his expedition to Ceylon embarked.

The next major ruler was Paramesvara who ruled from roughly A.D. 670 to A.D. 700. He too fought several battles with the Chalukyan rulers. Paramesvara was followed by the great ruler Narasimha II Rajasimha, during whose reign Pallava territory remained in peace, free from wars with the Chalukyas. Notable Pallava monuments were erected during Rajasimha's reign, particularly structural temples which contain inscriptions assigning authorship to Rajasimha. Rajasimha ruled until A.D. 728. His only son died before him and there was no direct heir to the throne. A dynastic revolution followed and finally a new line of Pallava rulers came to power.

The traditional view on the development of Mahabalipuram suggests that work at Mahabalipuram started in the reign of Mahendra and continued through the reigns of Mamalla and Paramesvara into the reign of Rajasimha. This theory is supported by many art scholars but it leaves us with certain unsolved problems. One such important problem is this: If Mahabalipuram is the result of artists working from A.D. 580 to A.D. 728—a period of nearly 150 years—then why is so much of it left incomplete?

Recently a new theory on the development of Mahabalipuram has been put forward. According to this view the monuments of Mahabalipuram belong to the reign of Rajasimha and were all constructed between A.D. 700 and A.D. 728. The earlier rulers, Mamalla and Paramesvara, were too involved in their military campaigns to have had time to construct any monuments. Rajasimha's reign was free from wars and the ruler involved himself wholeheartedly in the monuments of Mahabalipuram. The reason why so much of Mahabalipuram is left incomplete is that after Rajasimha's death there was confusion and anarchy with no one

left to succeed him. There was a dynastic upheaval and finally, after much unrest, another dynastic line came to the throne. And so Mahabalipuram remained untouched, the monuments being left in the incomplete condition in which they were when Rajasimha died. In my opinion this theory that all of Mahabalipuram was built in the reign of Rajasimha is the more convincing one.

Turning to the monuments themselves, let us look first at the sculptured scenes cut into the cliff face. Most important of these is the scene of Plate 24 which measures roughly 100 feet by 50 feet. The figures, including the elephants, are all life-size, and so you can imagine the impressive scale of the entire scene. The story depicted is generally identified as Arjuna's penance. The entire rock is divided into two halves by a vertical fissure and this natural crevice has been treated as a river —the river Ganga. To enforce the idea that the fissure represents the river, the sculptors have filled it with *nagas* and *naginis*—snake-beings often associated with water. These *nagas* are depicted in half-human and half-snake form, but at the very bottom of the fissure is depicted one *naga* in completely snake form. Swans and peacocks, geese and baboons and an elephant herd represent scenes associated with a river side.

An interesting detail on the river bank, just beside the first elephant, is the depiction of the ascetic cat [Plate 23]. Legend tells us of the false penance of the cat Dadhikarna on the banks of the Ganga in order to entice innocent mice into his reach. In the fable, the cat is described as standing with one eye closed, with arms raised, with half his feet touching the earth, and turned towards the sun. This is exactly how the cat is depicted here. On the bank of the river, opposite the elephants, is another scene that may be expected on a river side. Four men are engaged in prayers after having bathed in the river. Behind them is an elevated ground where there is a shrine with four ascetics in front. The lowlands are inhabited by antelopes, turtles, peacocks and monkeys.

Above this is depicted a wooded hillside with caves and dens for wild animals, and with roaming deer, monkeys and hunters. The main figure here is that of Arjuna, standing on one leg, emaciated and with hair and beard grown long. [Plate 25] Siva, pleased with his penance, appears before him. Siva's hand is in the *varada mudra*, the gesture of granting a wish. Siva is here granting to Arjuna the miraculous weapon for which

Arjuna is doing penance. This whole story of Arjuna's penance is contained in the Mahabharata. Arjuna, as you will recall, is the third of the five Pandava brothers, the heroes of the Mahabharata. You will remember how the Kuru kingdom was divided between the Pandavas on the one hand, and the 100 sons of Dhritarashtra on the other; how the Pandavas were tricked out of their portion of the kingdom; and how finally a great war was fought to resolve the issue. It was for this war

Unfinished Arjuna's penance, Mahabalipuram. Note the close similarity with the main depiction of Arjuna's penance seen in Plate 24. Here too the cleft in the rock has been treated as a river. [Plate 26]

that Arjuna did penance in order to obtain Siva's miraculous weapon, the *pasupatastra*. The story of Arjuna's penance is better known, however, from the poem known as the *Kiratarjuniyam*, written by the great poet Bharavi who lived around A.D. 600. It seems most likely that the rock carving at Mahabalipuram was directly inspired by this great poem. You will notice that just beside Arjuna and Siva are depicted deer, monkeys and rabbits, sitting unconcernedly among the lions. The *Kiratarjuniyam* tells us that when Siva appeared in the forest, the animals forgot their natural enmity and moved side by side. The dwarfish attendant figures are Siva's *ganas*.

Below this scene is the unfinished portion of the relief--almost one quarter of the entire scene. [Plate 24] This portion shows us the method of carving. The facade of the rock was deeply marked into a number of cubes, two feet square, arranged in rows and forming a sort of grid, almost as we might today make use of graph paper. The stone is granite, the hardest of all rocks. The right half of the relief, above the elephant herd, depicts various superhuman beholders and applauders of this great appearance of Siva before Arjuna.

An intriguing and exciting feature is the fact that a furlong to the south of this relief is a quite unfinished and much inferior carving depicting the same story. [Plate 26] This rock too has a natural cleft in it that splits the rock into two and is intended to be a river. The eastern half is carved in very rough relief with a duplicate representation of the Arjuna and Siva scene. The unfinished figures of Siva and Arjuna may be seen to the upper left. Near the cleft is a depiction of elephants. Is this an earlier trial model on which the main one is based? Or, is this a later degenerate copy? Each of us can form our own conclusions, since art scholars themselves are not agreed on the matter.

It has been suggested by some scholars that Mahabalipuram was a great royal workshop where artists were trained in the art of sculpture and architecture. It is pointed out that the large sculptured relief of Arjuna's penance is isolated from other monuments and does not seem ever to have served any specific religious purpose.

The theme is a varied and expansive one. The choice of such a theme may have been due to the desire of a master sculptor to give his pupils a wide variety of subjects to work on. A student of sculpture was here

given an opportunity of carving animals both naturalistically and formally. The entire right of the relief, depicting beholders of Siva's appearance, is covered with repetitive flying semi-divine figures. This theme may have had a purpose in the sense that the young artists were given the same subject for comparative study. The second unfinished relief strengthens this idea of a studio workshop. Perhaps, it was the work of newly apprenticed students.

Another interesting sculptured rock-face is the Krishna mandapa, fairly close to the Arjuna penance cliff. This too was once an open sculptured cliff face but at a later date a structural hall was built in front to enclose it. Various scenes from the Krishna legend are depicted here. There are a few other isolated rock sculptures too, but none of these other scenes is on the large scale of Arjuna's penance.

Turning to the rock-cut caves at Mahabalipuram, we find several unfinished caves that clearly reveal the method of excavation. The surface of the rock was divided into square grids and deep grooves were

Panel from Mahishamardini cave, Mahabalipuram, depicting many armed Durga seated on her lion, confronting the buffalo-demon. [*Plate* 27]

chiselled along the outlines of the squares. The cubes thus formed were removed and hollows thus scooped out. The general process of excavation resulted in the exterior being completed before the interior.

There are a number of caves at Mahabalipuram of which we shall consider only one that contains magnificent sculptured scenes within. This is the Mahishamardini cave that gets its name from the striking relief sculpture along one of its side walls. [Plate 27] This shows young slender Durga seated on her lion and fighting the buffalo-demon. The demon is shown in human form with just the head of a buffalo. The scene represents a moment in the war when Durga has not yet won, but the retreating stance of the demon and of his warriors clearly indicates the final outcome of the battle. On the opposite side wall of the cave is a depiction of Vishnu sleeping on his serpent. Vishnu's couch is formed by the coils of the serpent and its head is spread out behind Vishnu's crown. The caves at Mahabalipuram are all small in size and

Pancha Pandava rathas, Mahabalipuram. From left to right Draupadi ratha, Arjuna ratha, Bhima ratha. Dharmaraja ratha, cut from a single boulder of rock. To the right is the Nakula-Sahadeva ratha cut from a separate rock. [*Plate 28*]

very simple in plan. A pillared frontage opens on to a small rectangular hall at the back of which there is a shrine chamber.

From the caves we turn to the monoliths at Mahabalipuram which are small temples cut out of single boulders of rock. The best known of these is a group known as the Pancha Pandava *rathas*, situated somewhat away from the main group of monuments at Mahabalipuram. [Plate 28] Four of the five *rathas* have been cut from a single whale-back boulder. The fifth is from an isolated boulder, as are also the large animal figures. The term *ratha* is a misnomer as these little shrines have nothing to do with chariots, but the name is here to stay. The five are named after the five Pandavas and their common wife with whom the monuments have no connection.

These monoliths exhibit four completely different styles of architecture and they are in the nature of shrines. Except for the Draupadi *ratha*, none of them is complete and they clearly never served a functional purpose. The Draupadi *ratha* depicts the common man's hut. The Arjuna and Dharmaraja *rathas* represent what became the typical south Indian temple, but here in its very initial stages. The Bhima *ratha* is an example of a structure with a cylindrical form of roof that later became the basis of the typical south Indian temple gateway known as the *gopura*. The Nakula-Sahadeva *ratha* is an example of a U-shaped structure. This type was known as *gajaprista* or elephant-backed, and carved immediately beside this *ratha* is an elephant which drives home the point of similarity. For those inclined to consider Mahabalipuram as a royal sculpture workshop, these five *rathas* provide further support. They feel that it would be most curious that such different forms should be sculpted at one place if they were not intended for experimentation. The U-shaped *gajaprista* form is most persuasive in this connection. It is suggested that the apprentices were first made to carve out the elephant, and the curvature of its back was set out as the model for the shape of the shrine. The fact that these shrines were never completed and hence never in use, adds further to this argument. The *rathas* have been referred to as a 'riddle of the sands' and such indeed they are.

There are a few other *rathas*, besides this famous group. Right in the middle of the village of Mahabalipuram is the Ganesa *ratha*. This is in a relatively complete state and is a development of the cylindrical-

The Pidari rathas at Mahabalipuram. Their highly unfinished state gives an idea of how the rathas were carved from isolated boulders of rock. [*Plate 29*]

roofed variety, akin to the Bhima *ratha.* On the other side of the village are a few unfinished *rathas,* abandoned in a fairly preliminary stage of excavation. There are the two Pidari *rathas* [Plate 29] and the Valaiyan-kuttai *ratha.* These, like the Arjuna and Dharmaraja *rathas,* are the type of structure that formed the basis for the development of the southern temple. The unfinished condition of these *rathas* gives one a clear idea of how they were carved from single boulders of rock.

And so finally we turn to the structural temple at Mahabalipuram, the famous Shore Temple. [Plate 30] An inscription on the temple leaves no doubt that it was built by Rajasimha. The structure consists of two shrines placed back to back. The larger tower faces east and towards the sea, while the smaller one faces west. Fifteen years ago, the waves were beating directly onto the temple and spraying the courtyard inside, with the result that it is in a sadly ruined condition. Today the temple is somewhat protected by a semi-circular wall that keeps the sea at a safe distance. The towers of the Shore Temple are clearly a

The Shore Temple at Mahabalipuram. Note the tall, elegant towers that indicate a distinct development on the form of the Arjuna and Dharmaraja rathas of Plate 28. [*Plate 30*] →

development from the Dharmaraja *ratha*. In principle the two are similar with a square lower storey and a pyramidal tower in diminishing levels. But while the Dharmaraja *ratha* has a somewhat squat and heavy appearance, the Shore Temple presents a tall, elegant appearance, with a feeling of lightness and an upward soaring quality.

And so we are back once more to the problem of who was responsible for the monuments of Mahabalipuram. Could it perhaps have been the ruler Rajasimha as has been suggested in some of the latest researches? Rajasimha assumed over 300 titles in his various inscriptions. Of these the most popular and most frequently used was *Atyantakama* or 'He of Unlimited Fancies.' Other frequent titles are *Utsahanitya* and *Nityotsaha* or 'He who is Ever Enthusiastic'. He called himself *Kalasamudrah* or 'Ocean of Arts'. Rajasimha's titles indicate the likelihood of his having been responsible for the very different types of monuments that we have just seen to comprise the site of Mahabalipuram. If we are to assume that Mahabalipuram was built through the reigns of four rulers, over a period of 150 years, then we are certainly left to wonder why so many of the monuments are left incomplete.

In bygone centuries there was busy trade between the Pallava country, the island of Ceylon and the islands of Sumatra and Java. The most obvious evidence of cultural influence is to be seen in the monuments of the Dieng plateau in Java. The monuments there are known as Chandis, and they too are named after the Pandava heroes. They appear to have been directly inspired by the *rathas* of Mahabalipuram. Those who advance the theory that Mahabalipuram was a royal workshop suggest that the Javanese themselves crossed over to Mahabalipuram to be schooled in its sculpture and architecture workshop.

As you stand today and watch the sun setting behind the hill at Mahabalipuram, and see the drifting sands piling up relentlessly along the unfinished, deserted monuments, it requires quite an effort of the imagination to see Mahabalipuram as the major port it once was. And yet, it was from here that elements of Indian culture were transplanted across the seas in South-east Asia.

6

Amoral or Immoral ? The Erotic Sculptures of Khajuraho

AT KHAJURAHO IN Madhya Pradesh are a group of some 30 temples, scattered over a site measuring one square mile in area. They stand isolated amid fields and jungle and have been deserted for several centuries now. No regular ritual is held within their halls, but the majority of the temples are still well preserved. The Khajuraho temples were built under the patronage of the Chandela rulers, all within the relatively short period of 100 years from A.D. 950 to A.D. 1050. These temples are the only artistic monuments of the Chandelas who were generally noted only for their utilitarian structural undertakings such as dams and canals. The shrines at Khajuraho are dedicated to Siva and Vishnu and also to the Jain faith. The building of a number of temples on one site is not too unusual in India, but the fact that so many temples were built in so short a period would seem to imply some special ideal. Whatever the objective, it stimulated the art of building and sculpture to a remarkable degree.

The erotic carvings on the walls of the Khajuraho temples have been given exclusive attention in a number of recent publications. To put these sculptures in better perspective, I would like to discuss briefly the architecture of these shrines. So striking indeed is the architectural form of these temples that they would merit study for this aspect alone, even if the erotic sculptures had been absent.

The Kandariya Mahadeo temple at Khajuraho. Note the high basement, the elegant balconied openings to the interior compartments, and the graceful grouping of roofs. [*Plate 31*]

The Khajuraho temples are built of a fine-grained sandstone that varies in colour from cream to pink. None of the temples is of any great size. The Kandariya Mahadeo, the largest of them, measures 109 feet in length, is 60 feet wide, and reaches up to 88 feet in height. [Plate 31] Each temple is built on a high solid masonry terrace. In the case of the Kandariya Mahadeo this terrace is 28 feet high, giving the temple a total height above the ground of 116 feet.

All the other Khajuraho temples are of smaller dimensions. They rely for their appearance on their elegant proportions, their graceful contours, and their rich surface treatment. In plan they are very simple and basically consist of three main compartments : an entrance portico, an assembly hall and the sanctum. In the more developed examples there is a processional passage around the sanctum, as well as a side chamber on either side.

Vertically, the Khajuraho temples consist of three sections: a very high basement storey decorated with a series of mouldings; the walls and

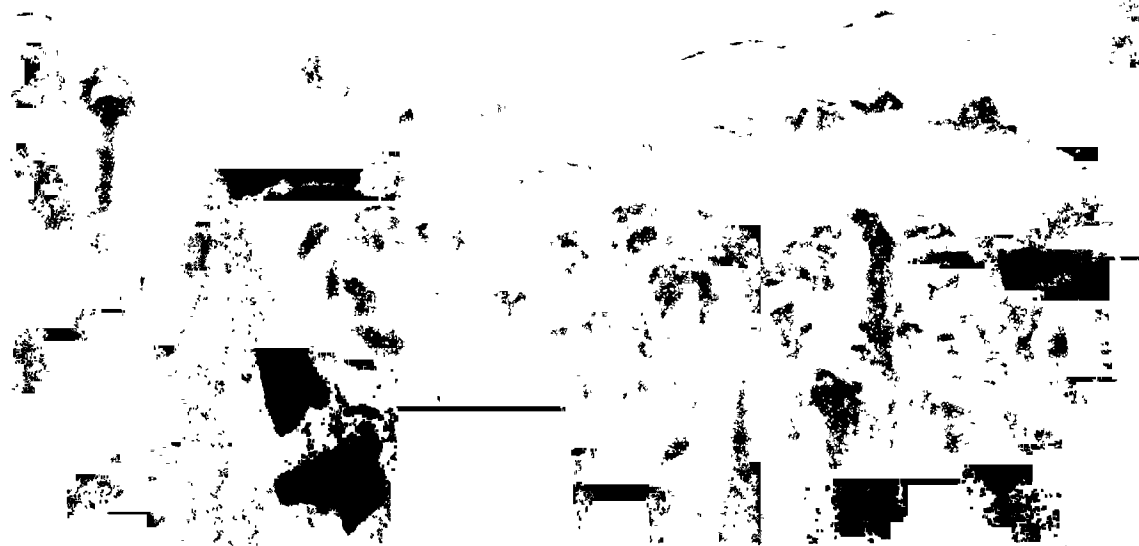
openings of the interior compartments; and finally, a graceful grouping of roofs culminating in the tall tower above the shrine. It is the central portion of this elevation that contains several parallel panels of sculpture that follow the projections and recesses of the walls and are carried around the entire building. These panels are interrupted by a set of balconied openings that introduce light and air to the interior.

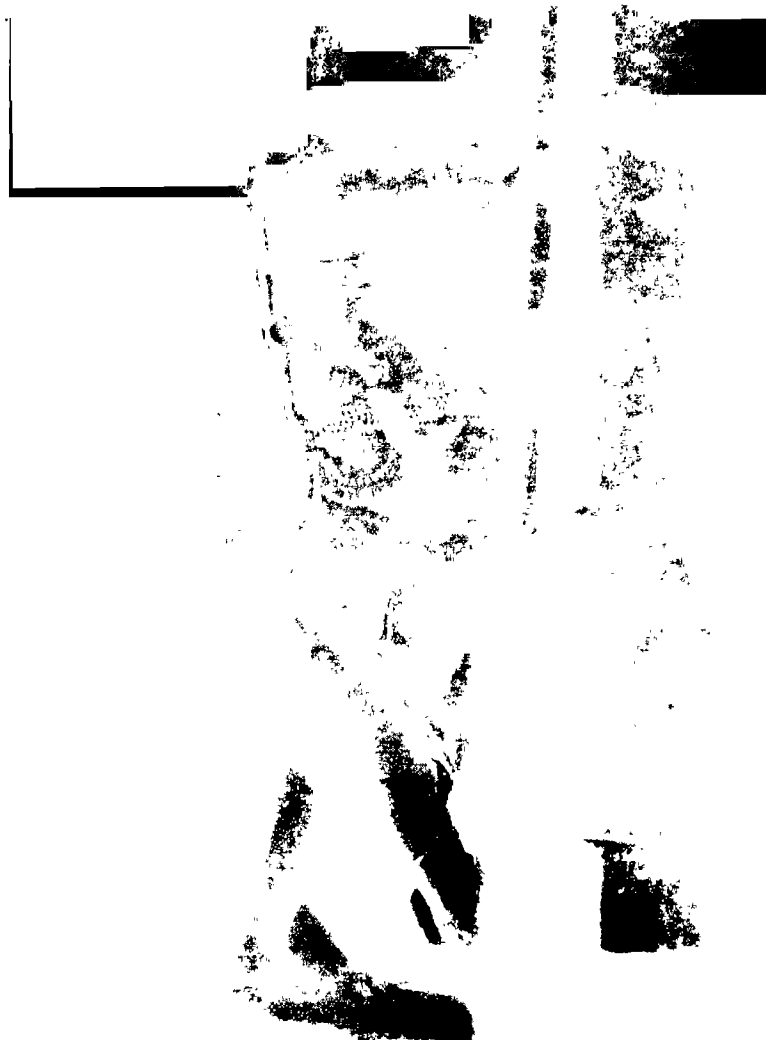
One of the most immediately striking features of these temples is the roof. Each of the interior compartments is distinguished by a separate roof. The smallest and lowest is that of the portico. Next in height comes that of the central hall. And these two sweep up to the tall shape of the tower above the shrine. Scholars have spoken enthusiastically of this rising 'crescendo of curves'.

There is a single entrance into each temple and this is approached by a tall flight of steps that rises steeply due to the great height of the basement storey. In the Kandariya Mahadeo, these steps rise to over 20 feet to reach the floor of the entrance hall. The doorway has, above it, a decorative archway that is so finely carved as to look more like lacy hanging drapery than like chiselled stone.

One of the most striking features of the interior is the decorated ceiling of the main hall. The design is usually a geometric one, an arrangement of intersecting circles. When one looks up at the ceiling, the entire surface appears like a swirling pattern of circles and semi-circles. In section these circles are a series of shell-shapes, with a long richly-carved pendant hanging from the centre of each shell. Every stone of these ceilings was carved separately and fitted together temporarily on the ground. When the whole was complete, the stones were hoisted up on to the roof and dropped into position so that they interlocked. The designs are complex and a great deal of skill and patience must have been required to produce the finished product. And finally, the entire work is visible only with the aid of artificial illumination because the ceiling is in almost complete darkness. What explanation can one offer for this? The best one can do is to quote the words of the poet Longfellow:

In the elder days of Art,
Builders wrought with greatest care
Each minute and unseen part,
For the Gods see everywhere.

Wall from the Devi Jagadamba temple at Khajuraho, showing the grouping of sculptured figures typical of the Khajuraho temples. [Plate 32, pp. 64–65]

It is, however, the sculptures of Khajuraho that provide the real attraction of the site. [Plate 32] In each temple we are confronted with a never-ending procession of human forms, carved with exquisite refinement. These figures are carved in high relief and in dimensions about half life-size. On the Kandariya Mahadeo temple there are 650 such

Apsaras from the walls of the Vishvanatha temple at Khajuraho. [Plate 33]

Apsara in twisted pose from the Parspanatha temple at Khajuraho. The positioning of the figure is one that is impossible to achieve in actuality. [*Plate 34*]

human figures. Each of the temples has, in proportion to its size, a similarly high number of carvings.

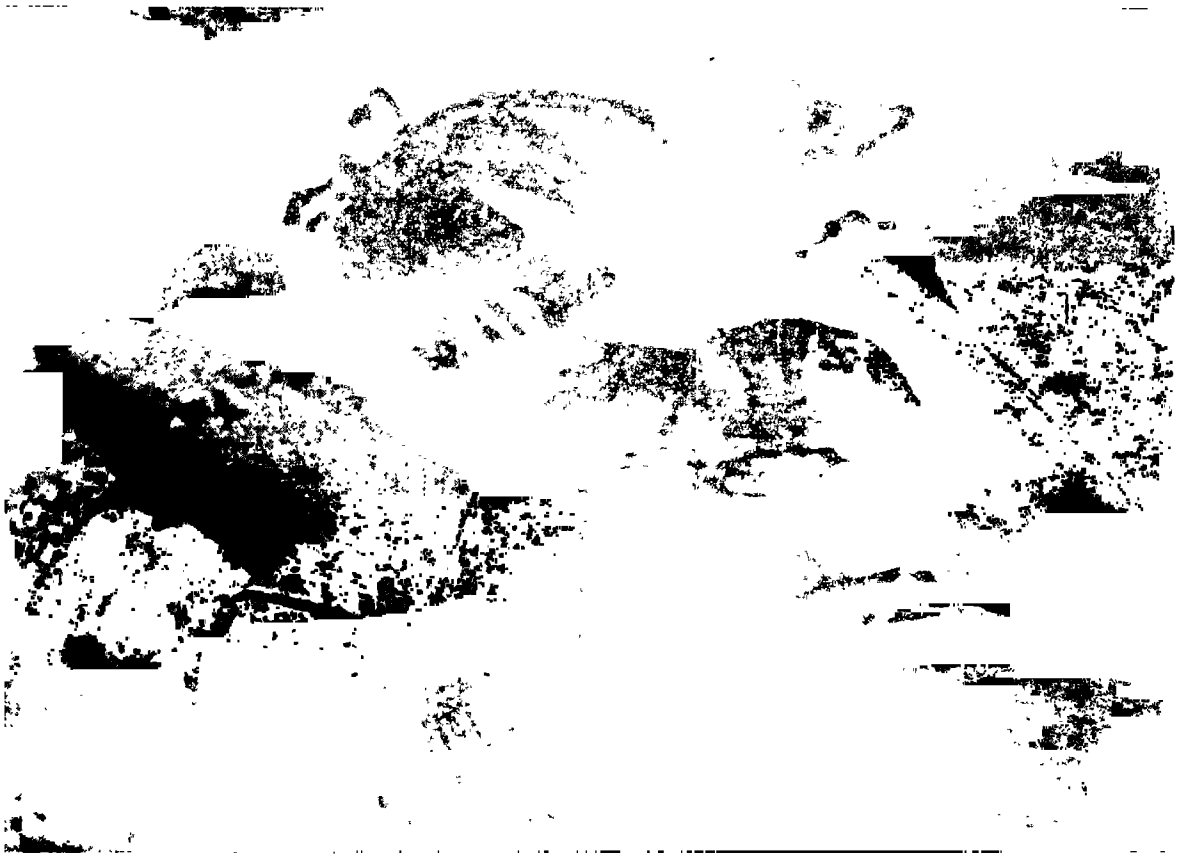
Outstanding among the figures are the many images of *apsaras*, the heavenly damsels. [Plate 33] Individually these maidens possess a great vitality and a provocative warmth and fullness. The figures are tall and slim and the legs sometimes much elongated. The *apsaras* are long-eyed, long-eyebrowed and long-eyelashed, and they display an endless variety in hair styles. We see crowns and ribbons, buns and flowing curls, and flowers, pins and jewels in their hair. They are broad-hipped, they have large shapely breasts, and they generally seem to display a languid eroticism. The *apsaras* stand in various poses: correcting their hairdo, applying makeup, adjusting their anklets, removing thorns from their feet.

The figures are carved almost completely in the round with only a small section of stone attaching them to the wall of the temple. The poses are generally exaggerated. Consider, for example, the *apsara* of Plate 34 from the Parsvanatha temple, a figure that occupies a corner position. The easy obvious solution would have been to place a figure standing there and looking out. But instead, the artists have placed the *apsara* with one leg flat against one wall, the buttocks parallel to the spectator, but with waist and shoulders turned parallel to the other wall. The figure is spirally twisted and in actual fact it is impossible to contort the body into such a position. Yet the posture appears easy and natural for the artist was a master. Occasionally the twist of the female figure is so exaggerated that you can see the buttocks from behind, and at the same time the upper part of the body is turned around so that the breasts are equally visible.

The men on the walls of the Khajuraho temples are handsome, sturdy and broad-shouldered. Some have a pointed beard, but most are clean-shaven. Many of them have hairdos almost as elaborate as that of the women. [Plate 32]

In addition to these figures, there are numerous representations of erotic art that illustrate the sexual act in all the varieties described in the Kamasutra. These scenes can be divided into two categories.

The first category is well represented by carvings such as the entwined couple of Plate 35 from the walls of the Devi Jagadamba temple. The couple is carved with extraordinary skill and feeling, and with remarkable mastery over the flexibility of the human figure, male and female. It is difficult for one to be detached completely from the eroticism of it all. Yet it is certainly not pornography. One feels, rather, that it is an appeal by the artist to share his enthusiasm for the beauty of love and sex. In this category of erotic scenes it is possible to talk of the 'Union of Cosmic Principles', or, in other words, it is possible to consider these erotic scenes as a symbolic representation of the union of the human soul with God.

From the earliest times sexual imagery was used in religious literature. In the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, belonging to the centuries B.C., the author uses such a comparison to try and explain the nature of the union of the human soul with God. To illustrate the doctrine that

Entwined couple from the Devi Jagadamba temple at Khajuraho. [*Plate 35*]

Brahman (God) and Atman (the human soul) are one and the same thing, the text says: 'In the embrace of his beloved, a man forgets the whole world—everything both within and without; in the very same way, he who embraces the Atman knows neither within nor without'. The ancient authors were trying to explain that Enlightenment is the realisation that Atman and Brahman are not two separate entities, but are one integral unit. They found the use of sexual symbolism the most graphic means of illustrating this fact.

The second category of erotic art at Khajuraho features scenes of group sex and these are connected with the Kaula and Kapalika cults of Saivism. The Kaula cult was at the height of its popularity during the

tenth century A.D. at the time when the Khajuraho temples were built. The best known Kaula teacher flourished at this same time. Kula is the ultimate aim of the sect, and we are told that Kula is the unity of Siva and Shakti (the feminine force). Kula is further defined as 'the state in which the mind and sight are united, the sense organs lose their individuality... and the sight merges with the object to be visualised'. We are told that the path for the Kaula devotee is one of controlled enjoyment of the senses. The sculptures at Khajuraho depict rather that the path was one of uncontrolled enjoyment of the senses!

The ritual practices of the cult instructed that its followers should partake of the *pancha-makaras*, the Five Ms. These are *mada* (wine), *matsya* (fish), *mamsa* (meat), *mudra* (parched grain). and *maithuna* (sexual intercourse). We are told that the use of the Five Ms, under certain prescribed conditions of discipline, could be made without secrecy, in appropriate places and times. Such rites, we are told, were intended to help progress towards the attainment of Kula, or complete freedom. However, the mercilessly drawn pictures of contemporary writers reveal an extremely debased form of worship, with promiscuous orgies lasting all night after sumptuous food and wine.

The practices of the Kapalika sect were similar to those of the Kaulas, except that they were associated with human sacrifice, and there was an even greater erotic emphasis in their ritual. These ascetics, if they may be described as such, constantly lived with female companions known as Kapalavanitas. They drank a great deal of liquor from skull caps (kapalas). A number of scenes at Khajuraho actually depict the Kaula and Kapalika ascetics partaking of sexual orgies. The Kapalikas are particularly easy to recognise in the sculptures since they always carry a club over their shoulder.

What are these sculptures depicting the rites of the Kaula and Kapalika sects doing on the walls of the Khajuraho temples? The temples themselves are the result of royal patronage and it would appear thus that royalty also patronised the Kaulas and Kapalikas. The explanation of royal patronage may be found in the fact that the doctrines of these sects provide a seemingly satisfactory explanation of group sexual activity. They argued that salvation is obtained only by those who can rise above the temptations of the senses. The height of sensual pleasure

was equated with wild orgies. But to realise whether one has risen above such temptations, one must partake of such experiences in their totality and still remain impervious to them. There is a plausible logic in this form of reasoning, and this afforded a kind of theological approval of the most debased practices. Such cults were likely to attract royal and aristocratic patronage wherever rulers and their courtiers were inclined to over-indulgence. It would appear that such was the case with the Chandela court.

After the brief period of Chandela patronage, the Khajuraho temples have remained deserted for centuries. The Kaula and Kapalika sects appear to have lost their hold in the area and worship in the temples was abandoned.

The question posed in the title was whether the erotic sculptures of Khajuraho are amoral, by which is meant a total unconcern with morality, or immoral, implying that they are contrary to morality. The people who propagated these cults seem to have been truly amoral and were apparently quite unconcerned with conventional morality or ethics. In addition, they had their own explanation for their rites and rituals, and they took pains to impress upon their followers that they should not be put off or influenced by general opinion. On the other hand, it is clear from comments by contemporary writers that society in general *did* find the behaviour of these sects immoral and contrary to morality. Whatever may be one's opinion regarding the amorality or immorality of these sects, it must be admitted that the erotic sculptures on the walls of the Khajuraho temples are truly artistic, a delight to the eye, and a testimony to the excellence of the sculptors' art around A.D. 1000.

Intricate carving typical of Orissan temples

7

Temples of Orissa

EVERY YEAR IN the month of June-July, thousands of devotees assemble at Puri in Orissa to witness the famous car festival of the Jagannath temple. At this festival, the highly-venerated wooden images from the temple are taken out in procession in a huge wooden chariot specially constructed yearly for the occasion. In earlier days, devotees are said to have thrown themselves under the wheels of this gigantic chariot. This practice attracted much attention in the days of British India, enough for the English dictionary to define 'Juggernaut' as an institution or notion to which people blindly sacrifice themselves.

The Jagannath temple records tell us that the temple was built by the order of king Anangabhima of the Ganga dynasty, and that it was completed in A.D. 1197 after 12 years of construction. The temple chronicles tell us of three major sets of repairs in the course of which the temple was plastered and whitewashed and many of the sculptures painted. Besides these, any number of minor and partial repairs are recorded. In the last century, applications of cement were made to the shrine tower due to the crumbling away of the stone from the salt-laden sea air. We are left with little idea of the one-time beauty of the sculptures but despite all the repairs, the temple presents a striking architectural grouping.

The shrine tower at Puri is a tall structure, of elegant proportions, that reaches up to 192 feet. [Plate 36] The back and the two sides of the tower contain large niches intended to house subsidiary deities. Since

the temple is dedicated to Vishnu, these deities represent three incarnations of Vishnu. These subsidiary-deity niches have small porches in front of them and are independent shrines in their own right. The main hall in front is a massive structure with a pyramidal roof. The receding levels of the roof are in two sections, being interrupted by a broad terrace. Standing along this terrace, we find a number of sculptures of musician maidens, carved entirely in the round. It is a great pity that photography is so strictly forbidden at the Jagannath temple. The only camera view possible is the one of Plate 36, taken from a clock tower across the road from the temple. The walls of the main hall are divided into a lower and an upper sculptural level. The lower sculptural level contains figures of lions stamping down on elephants, while the upper sculptural level comprises erotic figures, about life-size and in the most exotic poses. In front of the main hall is the banquet hall which is a low structure with

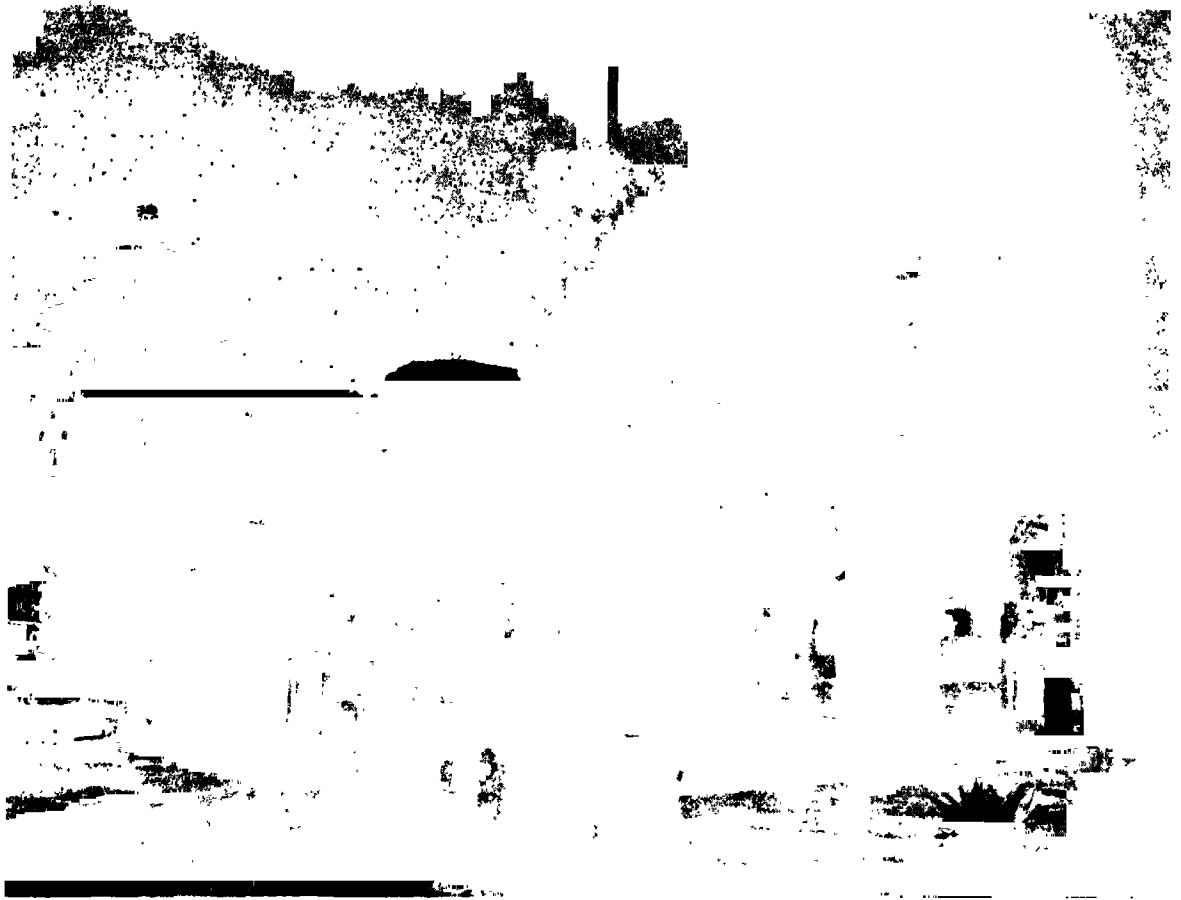
The Jagannath temple at Puri in Orissa. From left to right: the tall shrine tower, the main hall with a pyramidal roof, the banquet hall (low structure), and the dance hall. [*Plate 36*]

perfectly bare walls. The dance hall beyond this completes the four components of the developed Odissi temple. The walls of this hall are profusely carved. The pyramidal roof, like that of the main hall, consists of receding levels, but this is here in three sections with the intervention of two terraces. On these terraces too stand a number of musician figures, sculpted in the round.

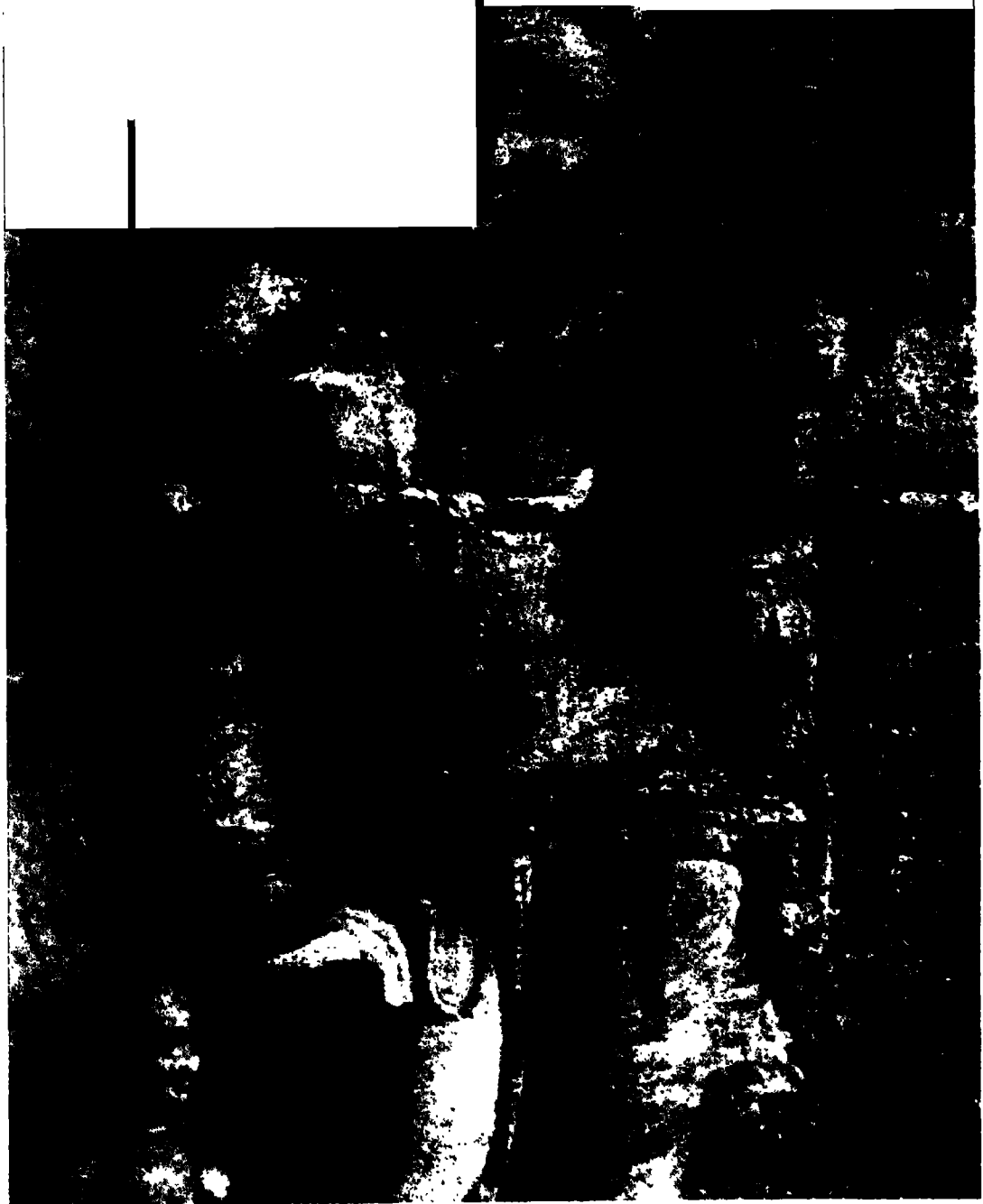
These four structures are surrounded by a high wall with an entranceway leading through. There is then a further massive outer wall (visible in the very front of Plate 36), which is 21 feet high and is built of plain blocks of stone. These walls completely shut out the view of all but the very top of the temple from road level. They were not part of the original plan in which the temple, built on a mound, was surrounded by a low wall so that the entire structure was visible from the ground. The present high walls date only from the last century.

The Jagannath temple gives us a good idea of the architectural components of the developed Odissi temple. To get an idea of the heights to which the Odissi sculptors had developed their art, we have, however, to turn to the Lingaraj temple at nearby Bhubaneswar, some 30 miles inland. The Lingaraj temple was built 100 years earlier than the Jagannath shrine at Puri. In its very elegant proportions and in the richness of its surface treatment, it is one of the most refined examples of temple architecture in India. The later and more famous Jagannath temple was actually modelled on the Lingaraj and set out, if possible, to excel it in every way. The ruler responsible for the Puri shrine felt all the more strongly this urge to excel because at that time, the Jagannath temple was one of the few Vishnu shrines to be built in a predominantly Saiva area.

The Lingaraj temple was built sometime in the eleventh century and when first constructed, it consisted of only the shrine tower and main hall. At a somewhat later date were added the banquet hall and the dance hall. The Lingaraj was then enclosed in a spacious courtyard with a massive wall around. Within this courtyard, numerous smaller shrines were added, their total number being around 100 Some eight of these shrines may be seen in Plate 37.

Much of the effect of the Lingaraj is due to the graceful proportions of the shrine tower as well as to its striking surface treatment. Vertically,

The Lingaraj temple at Bhubaneswar. From left to right: the dance hall; banquet hall; main hall; and shrine tower. In the foreground are some eight small shrines added at a later date within the Lingaraj compound. [*Plate 37*]

the tower roof is divided into a central rib, an intermediary rib on either side and two corner ribs. The central rib is adorned with the 'bho' motif which is rather like a coat of arms. It consists of an elaborate archway topped with a lion-head, with a dwarfish figure leaning against the arch on either side. There is the figure of a lion both above and below it. The intermediary ribs are decorated with a series of miniature replicas of the tower itself, placed one above the other. Crowning the tower is an enormous flat cushion-like structure, and above this is a *kalasa* (vase) topped by the trident of Siva.

The decorative treatment of the walls of both the shrine and the main hall is one of the most outstanding features of the Lingaraj. As at Puri there are two sculptural levels. The lower sculptural level contains a

Alasa kanya from the Lingaraj temple at Bhubaneswar. The group of maidens decorating the walls of the Lingaraj are exquisite examples of the Odissi sculptors' skill. [*Plate 38*]

series of niches housing various deities. These niches are separated by carvings of lions crouching on elephants. At Puri, it is these creatures alone that decorate this lower level.

The upper sculptural level also contains niches of deities, but here the niches are separated by figures of *alasa kanyas,* maidens at leisure. [Plate 38] They are in various postures, all relaxed and graceful. Some adjust their anklets, others their hairdo, some are in various poses of dance, yet others stand elegantly at ease.

It is likely that each person finds a favourite among these beautiful maidens, and Plate 38 shows the one I find most appealing. This graceful girl stands under a tree, with one hand resting on her hip and the other held up. She has the most elaborate 'bun' hairdo which may be seen above her shoulder to one side. Her face is exquisite with a pointed chin, gentle, smiling eyes, beautifully arched brows, straight nose and a gently upturned mouth. These maidens comprise one of the most exquisite groups of sculptures to be seen anywhere in India.

Thirtyfive miles from the Lingaraj and 25 miles from Puri is the famous Sun Temple at Konarak. [Plate 39] Today it stands as a great mass of ruined masonry along the sandy coastline, with the scattered palms and the casuarina trees swaying in the breeze to lend an air of melancholy picturesqueness to the deserted site. Much has been written in praise of Konarak, but few writers have pointed out that the Konarak temple is modelled, architecturally and sculpturally, on the Jagannath shrine at Puri. It is, however, comparatively vast in size, being twice as large as the Jagannath temple. All that remains intact of this once magnificent temple to the Sun god, Surya, is the massive main hall with its imposing pyramidal roof reaching up to a height of over 100 feet.

The Konarak temple was built by king Narasimhadeva who ruled between A.D. 1238 and A.D. 1264. The form of the hall is that of the typical Odissi temple hall already established in the Lingaraj and further developed at Puri. Exactly as in the case of the main hall at Puri, the lower sculptural level contains lion-like animals stamping down on elephants, and the upper sculptural level contains erotic figures, roughly life-size. There is hardly a single pose in these erotic groups at Konarak that does not have a predecessor at Puri.

In almost every way, the Konarak hall is an exact, though larger, copy of the one at Puri. The pyramidal roof is composed of receding levels and

The Sun Temple at Konarak. To the left are the remains of the shrine tower, and to the right is the pyramidal-roofed main hall. Note the gigantic wheels carved against the sides of the tall base. The entire temple was conceived of as the chariot of Surya, to whom the whole is dedicated. [*Plate 39*]

as in the case of the dance hall at Puri, the roof here is in three sections and is crowned with a large cushion-like structure. As with the Puri main hall, the terraces between the levels of the roof contain figures of female musicians sculpted in the round, and of striking elegance.

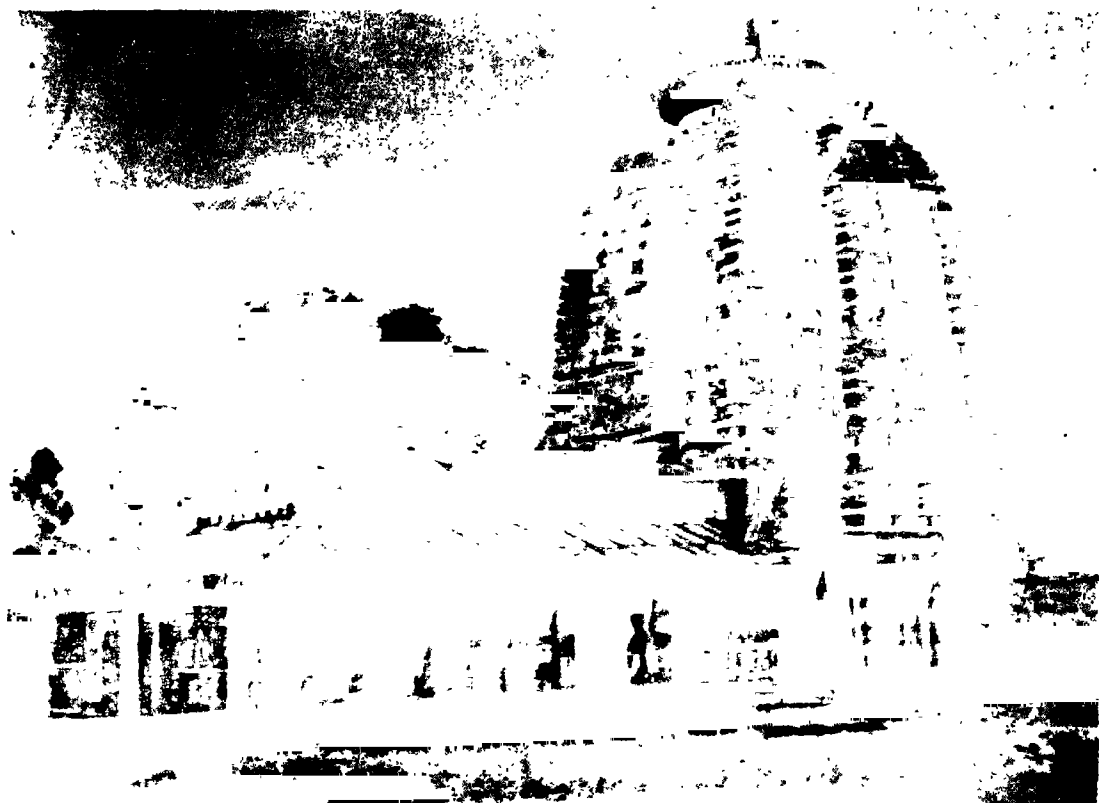
What makes Konarak so unusual and outstanding is that the entire temple was conceived of as a chariot—the chariot of the Sun god, Surya, to whom the temple is dedicated. Surya is always depicted in sculptures as standing in his chariot which is drawn by seven horses. Here the entire temple is elevated on a basement against the sides of which are carved 24 enormous wheels. This temple-chariot is shown as being drawn by seven horses, three on one side and four on the other. Each wheel measures

some 12 feet in height. Every portion of it is carved—the hub, the outer circle of the wheel, and all the 16 spokes.

We have no evidence as to the cause of the complete collapse of the shrine tower. Nor do we have any indication of when this happened. However, the temple is enthusiastically described by the chronicler of the Moghul emperor Akbar who ruled from A.D. 1556 to A.D. 1605. At that time it was obviously unharmed. By 1825 it seems to have been reduced to almost complete ruins. A visitor to the site at that date tells us that only a small section of the tower was still standing up to a height of 120 feet. Within the shrine chamber is to be seen only the carved pedestal of a once gigantic Surya image, now no longer in evidence. The three subsidiary-deity niches, which are partly intact, contain impressive images of Surya. Actual conservation of the Konarak temple started only in the present century. The main effort was applied to the hall which was in danger of imminent collapse. It was decided that the best way to stabilise it was to fill in the interior permanently and to seal the doorways. The final filling-in was achieved through a hole drilled in the roof. What little remained of the lowermost portions of the shrine tower was stabilised.

There is considerable disparity in the quality of the carvings at Konarak. Some of the carving, such as that which entirely covers the high basement, seems to have been left in the hands of relatively inferior craftsmen. Other sculptures such as the images of Surya seem to have been done by master craftsmen. The artists in charge of the sculpting of the large erotic groups of the upper sculptural level were certainly among the most highly accomplished artists in the country. The musician maidens on the terrace of the hall roof are also magnificent sculptures. [Plate 40] In its original condition, Konarak must indeed have been a most remarkable monument.

To get a correct perspective of temple art in Orissa and of its ultimate excellence in the Linagaraj and at Konarak, it is necessary to look back to the seventh century and to the beginnings of the Odissi temple at Bhubaneswar. The tiny Parasuramesvar shrine, with its clumsy tower and its flat-roofed hall is a good example of the early Odissi temple. [Plate 41]

Musician maiden from the upper levels of the roof at Konarak. These over life-size figures are carved so as to convey the gentleness and grace of the maidens. [Plate 40] →

The Parasuramesvar temple at Bhubaneswar is one of the earliest of the Odissi temples. To the left is the flat-roofed main hall, with the shrine tower to the right. [*Plate 41*]

The shrine tower is rather squat and reaches up to a height of only 34 feet. Shallow niches for the subsidiary deities exist on three sides of the tower. It is this feature that later evolved into deep box-like niches with a small hall in front, and thus into subsidiary shrines in their own right. The assembly hall of the Parasuramesvar is a flat-roofed, rectangular structure, with sloping eaves and a double roof. The hall has three door-ways opening into it, as well as grill windows on each face. These two structures completed the components of the early Odissi temple.

The evolution from this seventh century example to that masterpiece of the eleventh century, the Lingaraj temple, may be traced in the various shrines in the temple-town of Bhubaneswar. The hall acquires a pyramidal roof in receding levels, and then gradually both the shrine tower and

the hall attain larger proportions. There is an improvement in the quantity and the quality of the sculptural decoration.

The Odissi temples are mostly built of sandstone. The use of laterite is generally restricted to the unseen portions of the plinth and to compound walls. In later temples, important sculptures such as the subsidiary deities were carved from the fine stone chlorite. The Konarak temple is built not of sandstone, but of a very poor quality and most easily weathered stone called khondalite. This material contains felspar which in many places has altered its texture. It also contains garnet that has decomposed and become a spongy mass. No cementing mortar of any type was used in the construction of the Odissi temples. Large blocks of stone were prepared finely and laid dry, evenly and horizontally one upon the other. They were fitted together so that the joints are hardly visible, and kept in position mainly by their weight and balance. Iron clamps and dowels, and a system of interlocking flanges were also used.

One wonders how the builders managed to lift such heavy blocks of stone to such great heights, unequipped as they were with any modern mechanical devices. One method used in Orissa was to make an inclined plane of earth. In the case of the Lingaraj temple this plane was constructed towards the west where the stone quarry is located some four miles away. Several mounds along the way are, in fact, remains of this one-time ramp, and the bottom of the plane can be discovered to this day by casual digging. Such a method of construction also involved burying the structures in mud as they progressed in height. This meant that only one component of the temple could be constructed at a time, and that the shrine tower had to be complete before the hall could be begun.

The structures and the sculptures were planned so that the shrine tower and the hall could meet more or less accurately. But the juncture was rarely exact. Inexact joints, resulting in carvings being covered up in the joining process are to be seen in most of the Bhubaneswar temples, from the early Parasuramesvar to the later Lingaraj and on to Konarak. From the unfinished carvings on some of the temples, it appears that the designs were carved at the site after the building of the temple was over. A remarkable characteristic of the Odissi temples is the stark

bareness of the interior, which provides a striking contrast with the profusely ornamented walls of the exterior.

Orissa is one of the rare regions of India in which artistic development seems to have been largely independent of historical circumstances. From about the middle of the sixth century to the end of the thirteenth century, we can trace a continuous and relatively uninterrupted development of the temple style, despite the fact that this period of some 800 years saw at least five major dynasties ruling in the area. Elsewhere in India, art seems to have flourished largely under royal patronage, and the development of an art centre was closely linked with the rise and fall of a dynasty. By contrast, it would appear that in Orissa, art and architecture was very much under the control of a professional class of architects. and thus not too dependent on political fortune.

8

Mastery in Metal : Temple Bronzes of the South

ENSHRINED WITHIN THE darkness of the innermost shrine of the south Indian temples are bronze images of the god to whom the temple is dedicated and of his consort. Only the officiating priests are allowed inside the shrine, while the worshipper stands at the doorway contemplating the images by the flickering light of oil lamps. Many of these magnificent bronze images, some three to five feet in height, date back to around A.D. 1000. Unfortunately, one is unable to appreciate fully the beauty of these images since Hindu convention and the necessities of prescribed ritual have ordained that the bronzes be clothed and suitably decorated with flowers and jewellery, even though the artists have invariably moulded the images so as to reveal clearly bronze drapery and ornamentation. For the temple authorities, as well as for the worshippers, the bronzes, quite understandably, do not exist as works of art. To them the images are solely a symbol of the god and they exist entirely as objects of worship. The temple priests are somewhat perturbed at the suggestion that they might unclothe a sari-draped or dhoti-clad image to reveal a finely proportioned form beneath. For an artistic appreciation of south Indian bronzes, one is forced to turn to those few museums and art galleries that have been able to acquire collections.

The Chola dynasty of south India ruled from A.D. 850 to A.D. 1250. The age of the Cholas constitutes the most creative phase of south Indian

history and is one during which Tamil culture reached a peak. This is equally so in the field of literature, as in that of temple-building and bronze-casting. The method of casting the metal images is known as the *cire perdue* or 'lost wax' process. The image is first modelled in wax. This is then covered completely with clay, excepting for a small outlet for the wax. When this clay-enclosed wax image is fired in the oven, the wax melts, and the result is a hollow clay mould of the image. Molten metal is then poured into this clay mould. When the metal cools, the clay mould is broken open to remove the metal image. After this, the finishing touches are applied and the image is polished. This ancient method is the one followed even today in south India for making metal images.

Probably the most popular image in south India is Siva as Nataraja, or Lord of Dance. [Plate 42] in his heavenly abode on Mount Kailasa, Siva dances and he is said to have invented no less than 108 dances, some calm and gentle, others fierce and terrible. Plate 42 shows us a masterpiece of the Chola period, an image just under four feet in height that expresses magnificently the rhythmic movement of the dance. Siva stands on his right leg which is placed upon a dwarf monster. His left leg is lifted up and held across the right leg. One left hand follows the movement of the left leg. The other holds a bowl of fire. One right hand is in the *abhaya mudra*, the gesture of reassurance, while the other holds a drum.

Siva wears a cobra wound round him like a scarf. He wears abundant jewellery—anklets, toerings, armlets, bracelets, necklaces and earrings. His crown is adorned with snakes, skull and a crescent moon. His locks of hair splay out on either side with the movement of the dance. Surrounding the image there would have been a halo made up of flames. This is completely broken, but a part of it may be seen on either side of the pedestal. The world famous sculptor Rodin considered this Nataraja image to be the most perfect representation in the world of rhythmic movement. Certainly the grace and elegance of the figure, with its long flowing limbs and perfect physical proportions, is one to attract attention. Siva is Lord of Dance, but the Dance has a deeper inner meaning as well.

This Chola age bronze Nataraja from the Tanjavur Art Gallery is a perfect embodiment of the rhythmic movement of Siva's dance. [Plate 42, pp. 88]

...thmic activity is the source of all movement in the universe. ...s by dance that he creates the world, maintains it, and finally also ...it.

...s now ... acred text puts it :

... night of Brahma. Nature is inert and cannot dance till Siva ... He rises from his rapture, and dancing, sends through ... pulsing waves of awakening sound, and lo ! matter ... appearing as a glory around him. Dancing, he sus... ...fold phenomena. In the fullness of time, still ... destroys all forms and names by fire and gives new ...; but none the less, the truest science.

... continues to be one of the most popular images and ... today. Modern images, unfortunately, are sadly lacking ... and grace of the Chola bronzes.

... Tanjavur Art Gallery comes the elegant bronze group of Plate ... depicting the marriage of Siva and Parvati. Such pieces are known as *...alyana sundara murti.* The figure of Siva stands just under three feet ...gh. Siva holds in his two upper hands the deer and battleaxe. One front hand is in the *abhaya mudra,* the gesture of reassurance, and with the other, he takes Parvati's hand in marriage. Siva is slim and broad-shouldered. Parvati is full-breasted, broad-hipped and slender-waisted. The back view of this piece matches the front view in magnificence of execution. The group is a real masterpiece. It belongs to around A.D. 975, and hence to the early Chola period.

Another popular Chola theme is that of Siva as *Vrishabhavahanamurti,* or Siva with his vehicle, the bull. In the group seen in Plate 44, the bull is missing, but was originally placed in such a way that Siva's right arm rested on it. The images of Siva and Parvati are posed in a most elegant manner. The figure of Siva measures three-and-a-half feet in height, and the images, according to the inscription, date back to A.D. 1011.

Most large temples possess a number of bronzes, some of which are placed in the main shrine, and others in the various subsidiary shrines. The entire idea of bronze images came into being during the late Pallava period, due to an increase in temple ritual and also due to a new way of visualising the deity of a temple. Prior to A.D. 800, the god of a temple

Bronze Kalyana sundara murti, dated to around A.D. 1000, from the Tanjavur Art Gallery, depicts Siva taking Parvati's hand in marriage. [*Plate 43*]

was visualised in a purely spiritual capacity. In this capacity the god remained within the darkness of the shrine where he passively received the homage of the devout. At this stage, the main image of the temple, whether it was a figure of Vishnu or a Sivalinga, was an immovable one. During the late Pallava period, and even more so in Chola times, the god was conceived in another aspect also, in which he assumed powers akin to those of an earthly emperor. In this aspect he was led out to take part in various festivals and assemblies which were only partially of a religious nature. It was for this requirement that the bronze images of the gods were introduced. These metal images were known as *utsava vigrahas*, or festival images. In pre-Chola days, such images existed, but they were usually small ones to be carried in procession only within the temple precincts.

The tradition of large metal figures was introduced by Rajaraja Chola around A.D. 1000, when there arose a demand for a processional image to be seen by vast congregations. Each temple had one or more wooden chariots in which the large bronzes were placed after being dressed in silks, jewellery and flowers, and they were then led in procession through the town on important festival days. There are some three or four major festivals in the year, as well as a number of lesser ones. The inscriptions of Rajaraja on the Tanjavur temple tell us that the emperor presented several metal images to the temple, and they also speak of the magnificent products of the Chola metal sculptor, some of which we have been examining.

The smaller temples have only three or four *utsava vigrahas* and these are usually kept in the main shrine itself. One would find that most Siva temples would possess a *Kalyana sundara murti* group, which would be taken from the shrine on the occasion of the celebration of the marriage of the god. They would, at the same time, invariably possess an image of Nataraja, and perhaps a Somaskanda group—Siva and Parvati with their infant son Skanda. A Vishnu temple would invariably have an

Bronze Vrishabhavahanamurti dated A.D. 1011, from the Tanjavur Art Gallery. The bull Nandi is missing from the group but would have been placed so that Siva's arm rested on it. Note the extraordinary grace of the image of Siva. *[Plate 44. pp. 91]*

image of Vishnu with his two consorts, Bhudevi and Sridevi. Usually they would also possess a Rama, Sita, Lakshmana and Hanuman group. The really large temples such as those at Madurai and Srirangam possess quite a large collection of bronze images. Of these, some are kept in the main shrine, some in subsidiary shrines, and the rest in a room specially designed to house the festival bronzes.

9

Fretted Perfection in Stone : Hoysala Temples of Karnataka

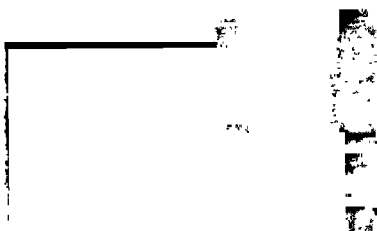
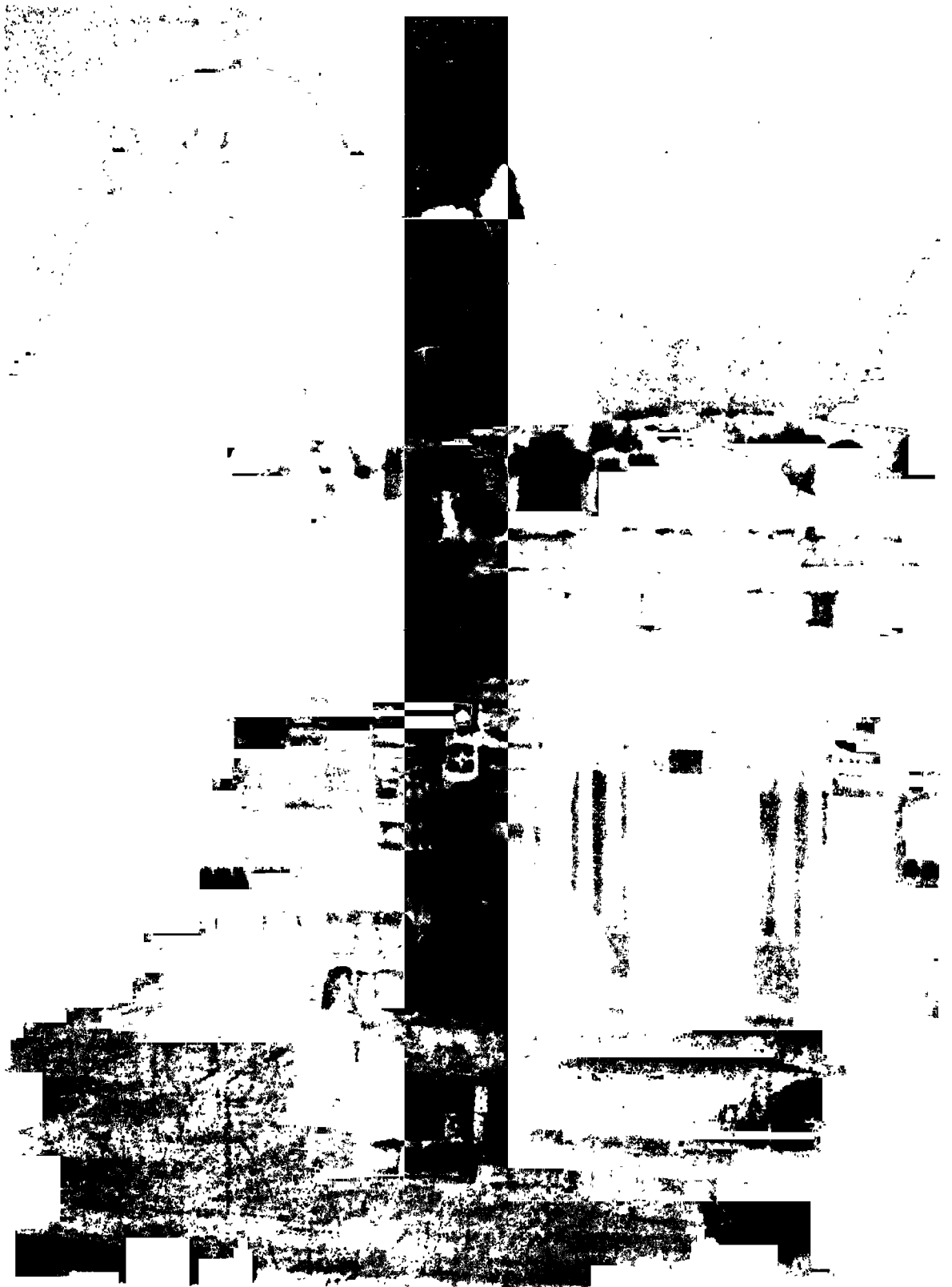
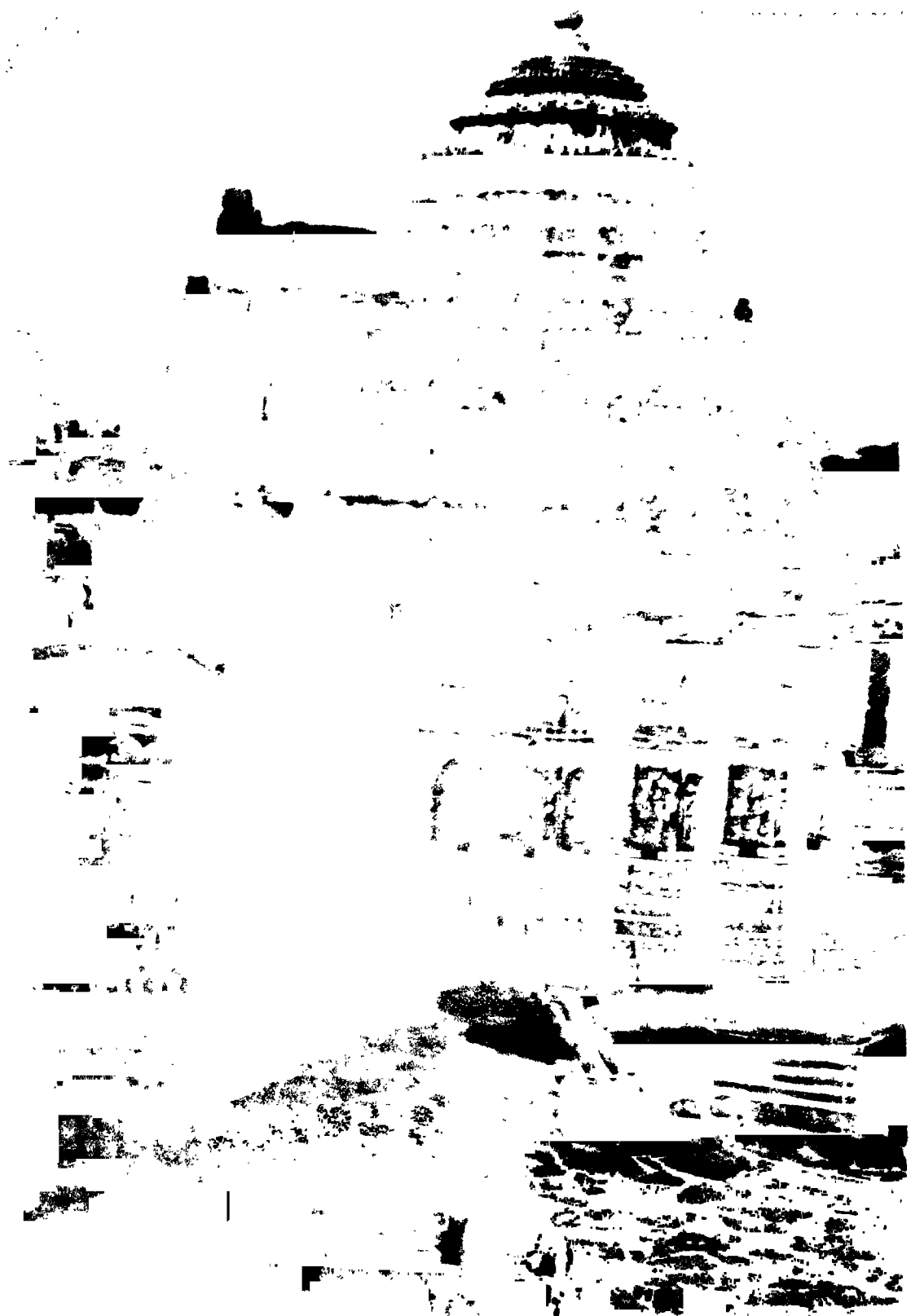
IF YOU VISIT Karnataka (erstwhile Mysore state), I am sure you will find it difficult to resist the temptation to acquire a carved ivory image of a Hindu deity or a finely chiselled sandalwood piece. The ivory and sandalwood carvers of Karnataka are noted for the extreme delicacy of their handicraft. This skill is an ancient heritage. It was apparent 900 years ago in the work of the stone carvers of the Hoysala period, who built the temples at Belur, Halebid and Somnathpur.

Separated from each other by ten miles, the villages of Belur and Halebid are in the Hasan district of Karnataka state and were once known by the ancient names of Velapura and Dvarasamudra. For three centuries from A.D. 1050 to A.D. 1300, they were the capitals of the Hoysala kings who ruled over the Mysore area. Seen from a distance, neither the Chenna Kesava temple at Belur nor the Hoysalesvara at Halebid conveys its full expressiveness because they lack the towers above their shrines. It is unlikely that these *sikharas* were left incomplete, and it is to be assumed that they somehow weathered and fell away, leaving only the lower portion intact. Though the architectural effect of these two temples is disappointing, a closer view more than compensates for this defect since it reveals the temples in their entire sculptured beauty. It is difficult to convey in words the impact upon the senses of the flawless technique of the

sculpture that covers literally every inch of the temple surface. This elaborate and detailed carving is a unique feature of the Hoysala temples. The cream-coloured stone used in their construction is a close-textured stone, very tractable to the chisel, soft to work upon when first quarried, but becoming hard with exposure to air. [Plates 49 and 50]

Some 30 kilometres from Mysore city is the temple of Somnathpur, which is built on a much smaller scale than those at Belur and Halebid. [Plate 45] We are considering it here primarily because it presents us with a satisfying architectural impression, since the towers above its shrines are intact. It is of very modest dimensions, 87 feet long and 82 feet wide, so that the entire temple is visible as soon as you enter the courtyard that surrounds it. It is a small but typical example of the Hoysala style, and presents in a compact fashion, all the architectural features to be seen also at Belur and Halebid.

The plan is in the shape of a cross and consists of a central pillared hall with a shrine attached to three of its sides. Above each of the shrines is a tower, only about 30 feet high, but well-balanced and finely proportioned. These towers consist basically of a scheme of horizontal lines and mouldings, resulting in a succession of tiers that diminish as they rise to terminate in a parasol-shaped structure. The motifs that make up the

The temple of Somnathpur near Mysore city is a typical, though small, example of the Hoysala temple. [Plate 45, pp 96-97]

← Typical Hoysala pillar from the Belur temple, made by a mechanical process in which the block of stone is mounted on a wheel and turned against a chisel.

shrine tower consist of a grouping of miniature shrines and niches. From the outside, the Hoysala temple reveals a star-like contour. This is emphasized because the entire structure stands on a very wide raised platform, the outlines of which run parallel to the shape of the building, following the points of its star-like shape.

Characteristic of all Hoysala temples is the particular form of the pillars, resulting from the mechanical process by which they were produced. The pillar is cut from a single block of stone and it became the practice to decorate these blocks by turning them on a large lathe. The stone was first roughly shaped to the required proportions, and then mounted in an upright position on a wheel, by means of which the block was rotated against a chisel. The entire pillar was converted by this process into a series of rounded horizontal mouldings resembling rings. As an extra ornamentation to these pillars, a sloping bracket stone was often attached on to the capitals. These brackets were carved from single slabs and fashioned into images contained within leafy haloes. [Plates 47 and 48]

The best idea of a pillared temple interior is obtained by examining the main hall in the Belur temple. Except for the four pillars in the central bay, each of the closely set pillars is of a different type. It appears that the design and construction of each pillar was entrusted to one head artist and his assistants, who combined as a team to produce their finest work. Each pillar thus became an individual masterpiece of invention and execution. One of the columns has been so contrived by the sculptor that it can be rotated at will.

A special feature of the Belur temple is the 38 bracket figures known as 'madanakai' brackets, decorating the capitals of the pillars. These feminine figures are finely carved in wonderfully animated poses. A number of these images have inscribed on them the names of the sculptors, indicating that each artist had contributed one selected specimen of his handiwork to the entire scheme. Plate 47 shows us a maiden looking into a mirror, with attendants on either side and a finely worked leafy canopy behind her. Notice the attention that has been bestowed on the finest detail of her hairstyle, clothing and abundant jewellery. It requires an effort to remind oneself that this is not some soft material like ivory, but is, in fact, hard stone.

←Bracket figure from the Belur temple. Note the intricate detail of the carving, particularly of the hairdo, jewellery and clothing. [*Plate 47*]

The same is the case with the vibrant dancing girl of Plate 48. Each of the bracket figures is carved with similar attention to minute detail.

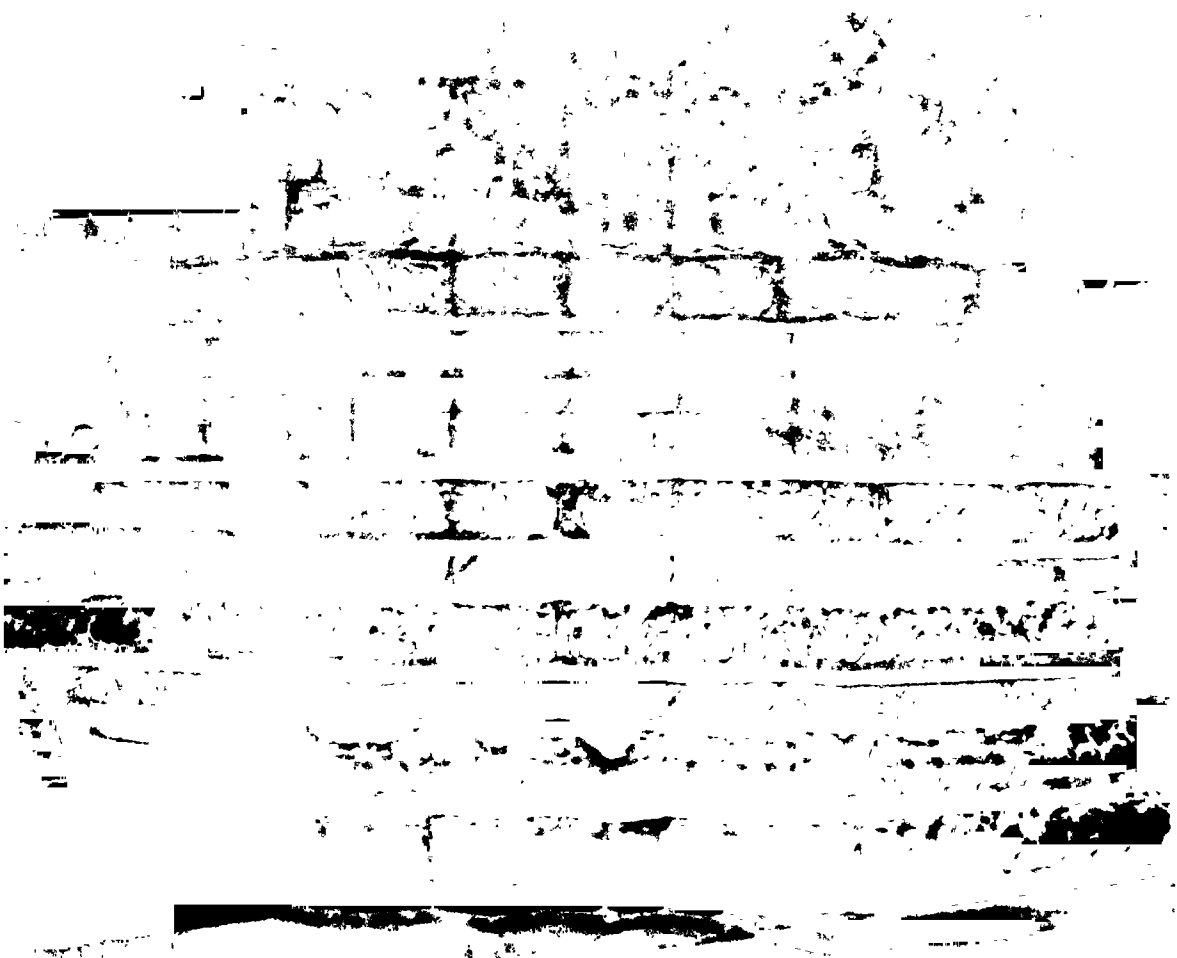
The highest achievement of the Hoysalas is the Hoysalesvara temple at Halebid, built around A.D. 1150. Despite the lack of the *sikharas,* this temple is a truly remarkable monument because of the intricate carvings on its exterior walls. Such sculpture is in evidence at Belur and Somnathpur also, but at Halebid it excels itself. The Hoysalesvara temple consists of two complete temples of exactly the same dimensions built side by side. The whole complex occupies the greater part of a 200 feet square area.

The exterior of the temple is a riot of carving that almost defies description. The lower section of the temple consists of a tall vertical wall some nine to ten feet high. This is made up of a number of bands of continuous animated designs running right around the building. These carved borders are to be seen on all the temples in the same sequence. The lowest consists of a procession of elephants, followed by a border of lions. Then there is a band of purely decorative foliage. Above this is a border of horsemen,followed by another floral band.

The next border is a frieze about a foot wide, depicting a succession of scenes from the great epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. This frieze is a regular picture gallery in stone, carved with dramatic flourish and with great wealth of detail. The frieze is on eye-level and attracts immediate attention.

Above this is a border of *yalis,* crocodile-like monsters, with spirals of foliage emerging from their mouths. Above is a band of running swans, topped by a broad border of decorative foliage. Variety in repetitiveness seems to be the theme of these friezes. [Plate 49]

The section above this is different in treatment on the hall and on the shrines. Along the hall we find perforated stone screens, interrupted by slender pillars placed at regular intervals. The corresponding section on the shrine walls (which is what we see in Plate 49), is treated in a much more ornate manner. In the broad space at his disposal in this most prominent part of the building, the Hoysala craftsman shows us his skill as a figure sculptor. In decorative niches, or under leafy canopies, are innumerable carved figures of various gods and goddesses,

← Bracket figure from the Belur temple. Note the fine tracery of the halo behind the image. [*Plate 48*]

finely cut and ornamented in minute detail. Each figure is half life-size, and all are modelled in extremely high relief. The entire series provides a full record of the Hindu gods, unusually complete, and with all the accessories, attributes and symbols of each celestial being.

In the centre of Plate 50, we see Vishnu in his incarnation of Narasimha, or half-man, half-lion. We see him standing on his right leg. Across his bent left leg he holds Hiranyakasipu whom he is just destroying. The story, as you may remember, is that Hiranyakasipu performed great penances and obtained a boon from Brahma by which he could be killed by neither man nor beast; neither on earth nor in heaven; neither by day nor by night; and not by the use of any conventional earthly or heavenly weapon. Safeguarded thus, he began harassing men and gods, until finally the gods appealed to Vishnu. Vishnu took a form that was neither man nor beast; he killed Hiranyakasipu at twilight, which was neither day nor night; he killed him holding him up in the air, which was neither on earth nor in heaven; and he killed him by tearing him open with his lion-claws, which was not any known conventional weapon. Thus, none of the conditions of Brahma's boon was violated. Narasimha is depicted with numerous arms, and in two of them he holds Vishnu's distinguishing emblems, the conch shell *(sankha)* and discus *(chakra)*.

To the extreme left of Plate 50 is depicted an aggressive form of Siva, probably that of Kamantaka. In this form Siva kills Kama, the god of love, for having disturbed him in his meditation and tempted him to fall in love with Parvati. Siva is standing on his right foot which presses down on Kama. To the left is seen his bull Nandi, and to the right is the form of an emaciated sage. Siva is depicted with numerous arms in which he carries various emblems including a trident, drum and a staff with a skull mounted on it.

To the extreme right of Plate 50, we see the graceful form of the dancing Sarasvati. As the consort of Brahma, she is to be identified by the fact that depicted beside her, on the pedestal, is the swan which is Brahma's mount. In her lower right hand she holds an *akshamala* (rosary) which is Brahma's attribute. On either side of her are musician

←*Exterior wall decoration on the Halebid temple, Karnataka.* [Plate 49]

Details of some of the enshrined images decorating the exterior walls of the Halebid temple, Karnataka From left to right : Siva as Kamantaka ; Vishnu as Narasimha ; Dancing Sarasvati. [*Plate 50*]

maidens providing the music for her dance. Above her is an intricately carved canopy.

Side by side with the statues of deities and divine beings are found feminine figures in striking dance poses, or in the process of putting finishing touches to their toilet. The images are carved with infinite attention to detail, and they have about them an air of magnificence and exuberance. Not a single detail is forgotten—hairstyle, clothes, jewellery including headdress, pendant and girdles. The effect of these sculptures is enhanced by the play of light and shade, resulting from the star-shaped plan of the Hoysala temples.

It is the incredible intricacy with which each detail of this extensive conception is treated that is so overwhelming and fills the spectator with such astonishment. The quality of the art thus represented is not of such a specially high order as in some other schools of Indian sculpture. Certainly the figures of Plate 50 cannot compare for perfection of

modelling with, say, the bronzes of the southern temples seen in Plates 42 to 44. Much of the Hoysala figure-modelling is taut and stylised and lacking in breadth. But as a sustained artistic effort, the walls of this temple are unequalled.

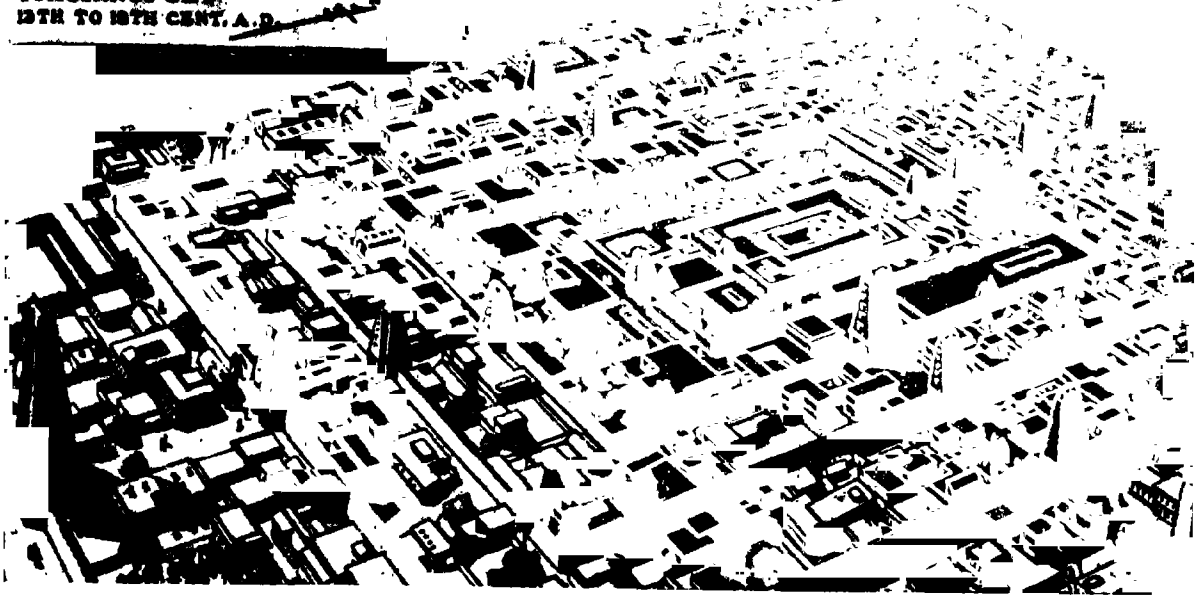
The Hoysala craftsmen, it seems, were not so much builders and sculptors, as art craftsmen, akin to the sandalwood carver, the ivory worker, the metal caster and the goldsmith. What they produced was not so much architecture as applied art. In the fine chiselling of the images within their leafy shrines on the exterior walls, we seem to see an enlarged reproduction in stone of the sandalwood shrines which even today are a speciality of the Karnataka craftsmen. In the bracket figures, there is a touch of the ivory worker. In the wealth of stone jewellery with which many of the figures are loaded, one seems to recognize the delicate handling of the goldsmith. In the manner in which the bracket figures are attached to the pillars and ceiling with studs and rivets, we see the skill of the metal caster.

Each craftsman engaged in work on the temples tried to give of his best and seems to have succeeded. The story goes that the most famous of Hoysala sculptors, the famous Jakkanachari, cut off his right hand when his son pointed out a flaw in his work on the Belur temple. Such was the pride that the Hoysala craftsmen took in their work on these exquisitely carved temples!

10

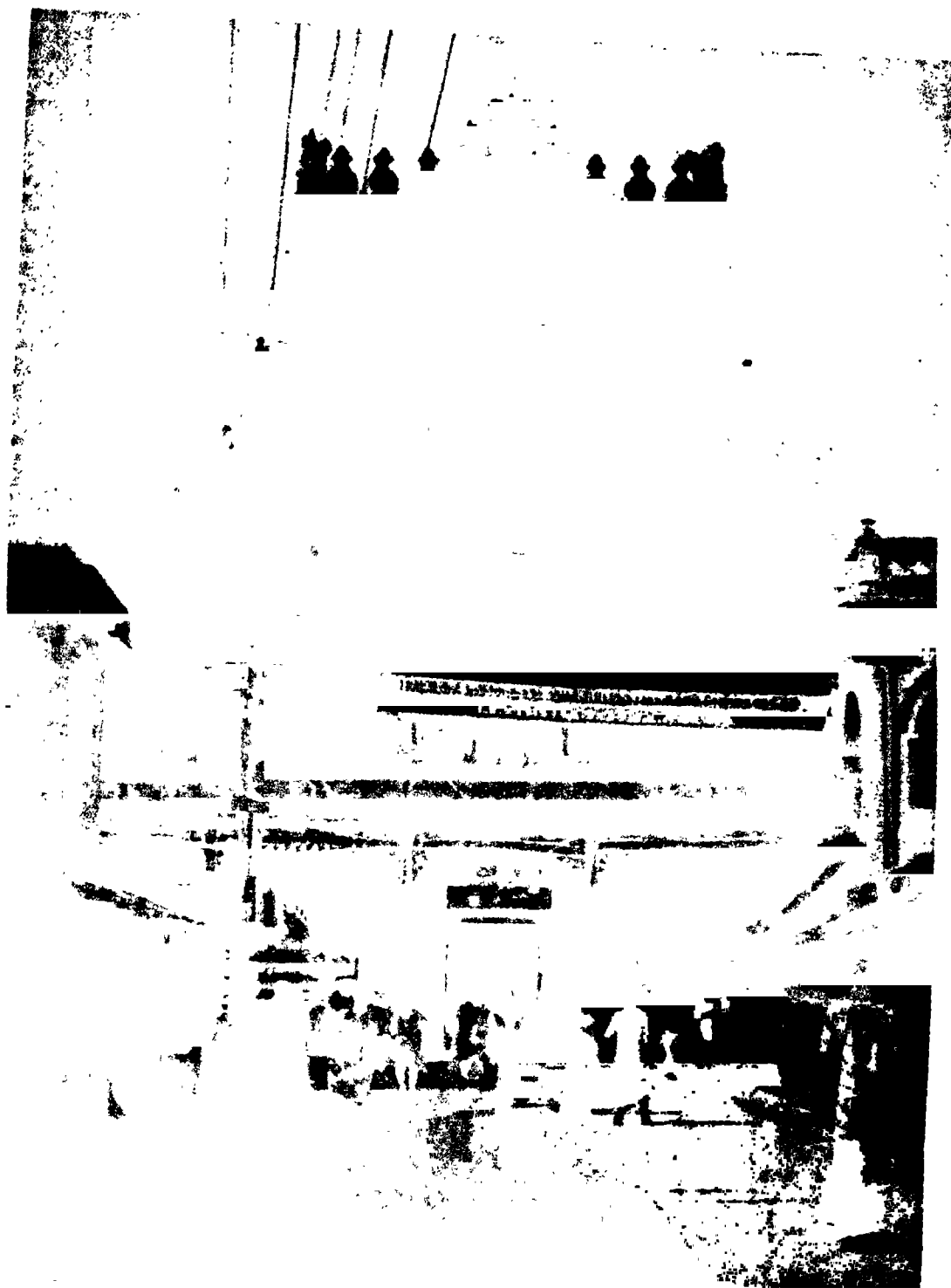
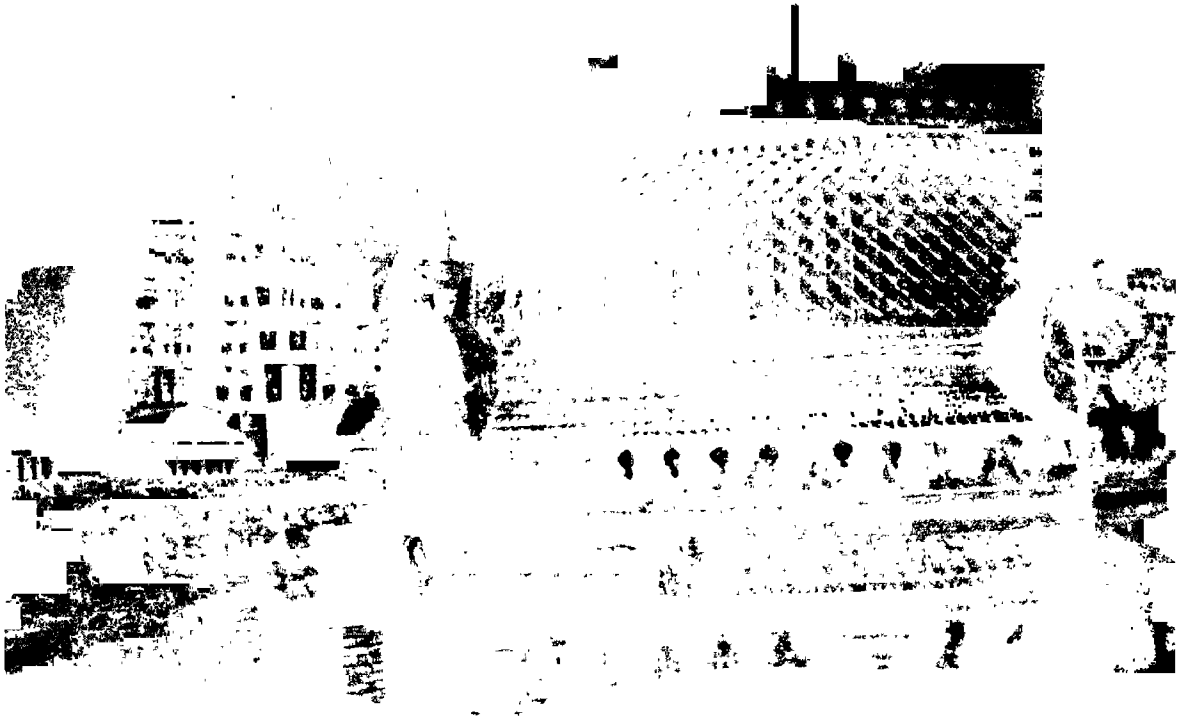
The Temple that is a Township : Srirangam

THE TOWN OF Srirangam, six miles west of Tiruchchirapalli, has a picturesque location. The river Kaveri divides to form its tributary the Kolladam just as it reaches Srirangam. and the two separate streams weave a garland around the temple-town. The Srirangam temple is remarkable mainly because of its dimensions, the whole being equal in area to a fair-sized town. The outermost wall is a rectangle roughly 2900 feet by 2500 feet, enclosing an area of over one quarter of a square mile. The walk around the outer wall, and not many choose to undertake it, is almost two-and-a-half miles long. The temple consists of seven rectangular enclosures. one within the other. There are 21 entrance gateways known as *gopurams,* leading into these various enclosures. [Plate 51]

The three outer courts at Srirangam are not of any special architectural or even religious significance. They are just like the surrounding town and form a sort of bazaar. It is here that one buys flowers, fruits, garlands and incense to take into the shrine for worship. Here too are the houses for the numerous temple employees; eating places for the worshipper who has often travelled a long distance to the temple; stables for the temple animals; in short, almost everything a normal township would provide.

Simplified plan of Srirangam temple showing the seven enclosures and twenty-one entrance gopurams. Only the two innermost enclosures are roofed-in: the others are open to the sky. [Plate 51]

The architectural portion of the temple begins with the fourth court, the outer wall of which measures roughly 1200 feet by 850 feet. There are entrance *gopurams* in the middle of three of the sides. Within this courtyard are two interesting structures. One is the Hall of a Thousand Pillars, with carved granite pillars arranged in rows. Most of the large southern temples have such halls. The other building is the famous 'Horse Court' which contains rows of pillars carved as furiously rearing horses. Each horse rears up to a height of nearly nine feet and the strength and vigour of these animals is most emphatically conveyed. [Plate 52] The third enclosure has a *gopuram* to the north and the south. The enclosure contains a fine pillared hall known as the Garuda mandapa. At the side of the hall is a covered tank known as the Surya Pushkarini, or Sun Tank. At the opposite end of the enclosure is another tank, horse-shoe in shape, called the Chandra Pushkarini, or Moon Tank.

The second enclosure is also entered by *gopurams* to the north and the south. [Plate 53] This court is a completely covered one. It is occupied mainly by pillared pavilions with a long processional pillared passage to its western side. Within this is the innermost enclosure with a single

The 'Horse Court' from the fourth enclosure of the Srirangam temple. [Plate 52, pp 108]

Gopuram leading into the second enclosure of the Srirangam temple. [*Plate 53*]

Golden domical roof of the main shrine of the Srirangam temple, projecting above the flat roof of the innermost enclosure. [*Plate 54*]

gopuram on the south side. This innermost court is also covered and measures 240 feet by 181 feet. It contains the sanctuary which appears to be a square compartment, but the actual chamber within is circular. This is seen by its golden domical roof which projects above the flat roof of the enclosure. [Plate 54]

The Srirangam temple consists then of seven rectangular enclosures, containing within them a collection of buildings, halls, courts, tanks and shrines of various kinds. [Plate 51] In its original form the southern temple consisted of just a shrine with its tower, and a hall in front. These two were enclosed within a courtyard with a single entrance *gopuram*. How did it come about that the southern temple finally reached the stage of a temple-town as at Srirangam? Srirangam is an outstanding example, but it is by no means a solitary example. All the southern temples, Madurai, Chidambaram, Ramesvaram, Tirunelveli, Tiruvannamalai, consist of a similar rather confused grouping of buildings within several courtyards with *gopurams*, and all without any apparent pre-conceived plan. Most

of the southern temples reached their final form in gradual stages. Additions were made to the temple scheme at different periods and the final effect was reached over a long course of years.

This temple movement began under the Pandya dynasty in the thirteenth century and reached its climax under the Nayak rulers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Around A.D. 1250, the Pandyas defeated the Chola rulers and established themselves as the main power in south India. Up to this stage it had been the practice of the builders to devote their finest craftsmanship to the most sacred part of the temple—the shrine and its tower. Under the Pandyas this practice changed. Instead of the shrine being the central architectural production, much of the builders' skill was diverted to the decoration of outlying portions of the temple scheme.

One of the reasons for this change was that of sentiment. Throughout south India, on sites of great religious antiquity, were located a number of buildings of no particular artistic character. They were, however, of great sanctity because within them were enshrined images deserving of deep and lasting veneration. Many of the magnificent southern bronzes we considered in chapter 8 were originally contained within such shrines. Religious sentiment maintained that although these structures were architecturally insignificant, it was not proper to pull them down and put up others in their place. It was not considered proper even to change their appearance by, for example, increasing the height of the tower or by enlarging the hall. At the same time, these shrines were considered most holy and religious emotion for them had to find some outlet. This was done by surrounding these small shrines with high walls and making the entrances to these enclosures into gateways of an imposing size and appearance.

But from a single wall with an impressive *gopuram* to seven walls with 21 *gopurams* as at Srirangam is a long jump. What led to such a development ? To a large extent, this growth of the southern temple was due to a corresponding growth of the temple ritual. The ceremonies associated with the religion had become very elaborate and this naturally had an effect on the buildings in which these ceremonies were performed. Part of the increase in the size of the temple was due to the wider powers now assigned to the deity. As we saw in chapter 8, the god

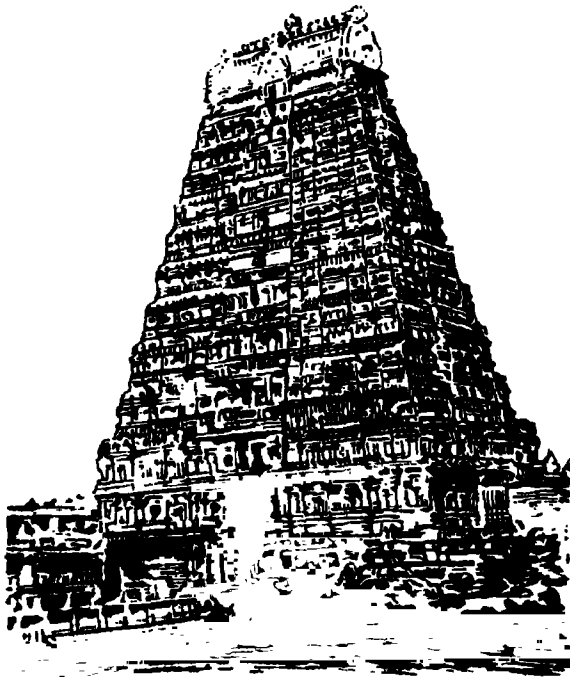
was now visualised in two capacities—one spiritual and the other rather like that of an earthly ruler. In his spiritual capacity he remained within the darkened mystery of the shrine, in the inner portion of the temple. However, on certain occasions, the god emerges from his retreat, assuming a form like that of an earthly ruler. In this aspect he is led forth in procession to take part in festivals and ceremonies of a semi-religious character. For this purpose the outer portions of the temple came into existence.

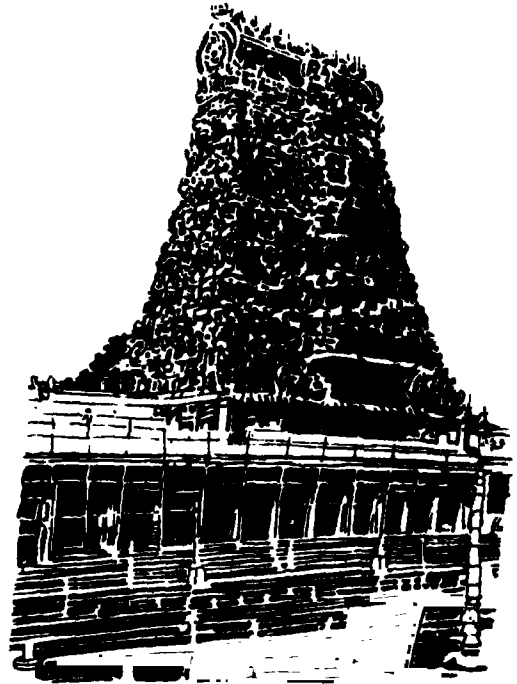
The enlargement of the southern temple proceeded on the following lines. Beginning from the centre, the shrine and its porch were enclosed within a spacious, flat-roofed structure forming the innermost court, the entrance to this being through a small *gopuram*. In course of time, this covered court itself came to be contained within another covered court. To this court there were two entrance *gopurams*. This generally completed the portion of the temple that was wholly covered and most sacred. The next step was that of enclosing both these covered courts within a rectangular enclosure, bounded by a high wall. A wide open courtyard known as a *prakaram* was left all around. Within this *prakaram* were added various structures, chiefly pillared halls and subsidiary shrines. There were also buildings of a semi-religious character such as granaries and rooms for storing the ceremonial supplies. This enclosure too was entered into by two *gopurams*. After a time, a still higher enclosing wall was added, leaving another appreciably larger *prakaram* all around. Within this enclosure, which was usually the last one, two important structures are to be found. One is a hall of a thousand pillars. The other is a tank for ceremonial bathing, lined with steps and surrounded by pillared corridors. Four *gopurams* led into this *prakaram*, and each set of *gopurams* was larger than the ones of the previous *prakaram*.

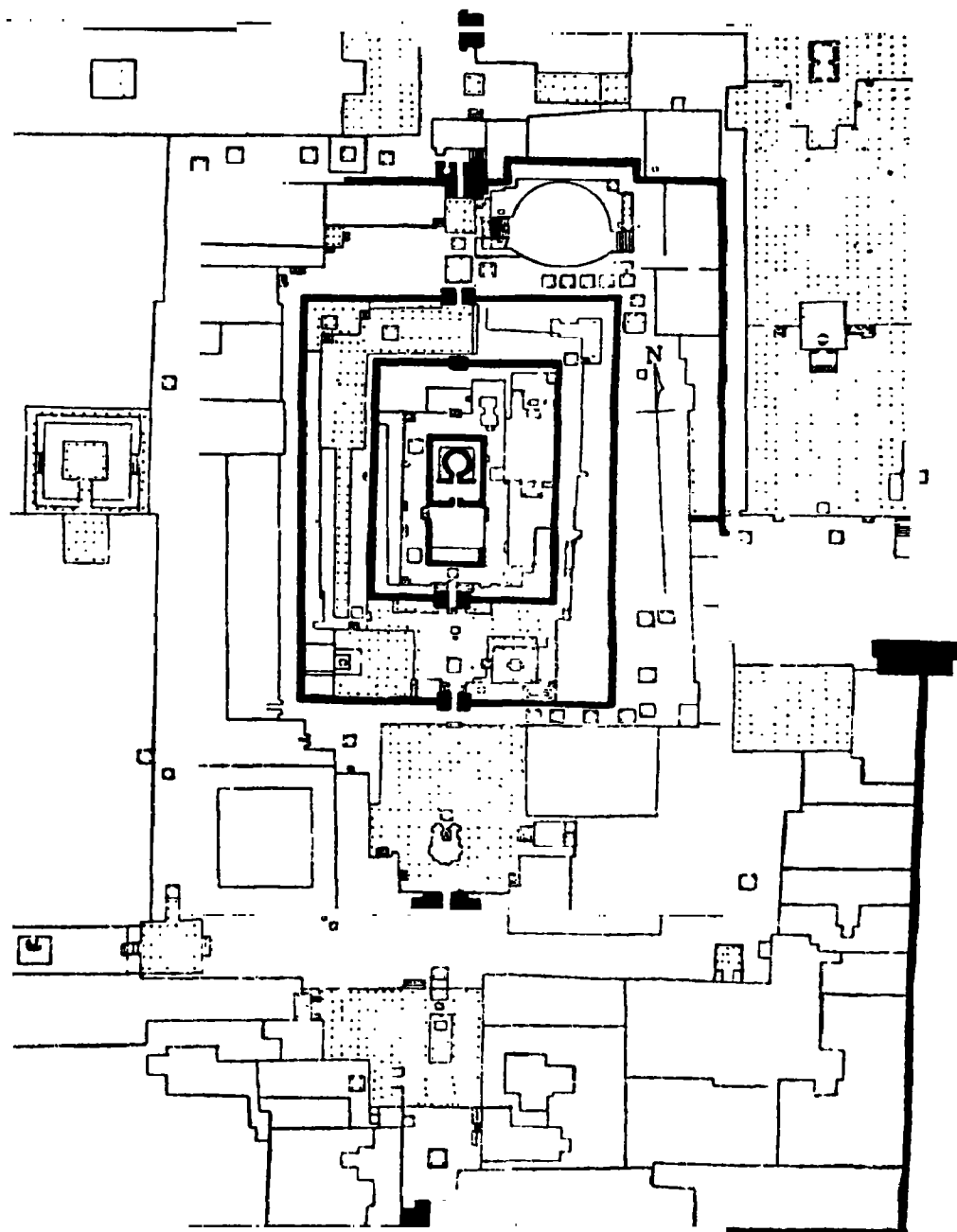
The entrance *gopurams* were introduced so frequently into the southern temple scheme that they have become the most striking feature in the temple architecture of the south. As you drive through the southern countryside, the approach of any major town is indicated by the *gopurams* that appear on the horizon. Some of them are really sky-scrapers, reaching up to a height of 200 feet. At Srirangam, the *gopurams* of the outermost enclosure are unfinished, but construction has proceeded

enough to show that had they been finished according to the usual proportions, they would have attained the tremendous height of 300 feet. A typical *gopuram* consists of a building oblong in plan, rising up to a tapering tower, often over 150 feet in height. It is entered by a rectangular doorway in the centre of its long side. This corridor leading through the *gopuram* has rooms on either side intended to house the temple guards and doorkeepers. Out of one of these rooms leads a staircase by means of which the summit may be reached.

Almost invariably the two lower stories of the *gopuram* are vertical and are built of solid stone. This provides a stable foundation for the superstructure which is usually composed of lighter material such as brick and plaster. The tower section is pyramidal in shape and is composed of a series of tiers that diminish as they ascend. The average angle of slope from the vertical is 25 degrees, and the width at the top is approximately half of its base. At the flat top is an elongated type of roof. *Gopurams* all over south India follow this basic pattern.

It is possible, however, to divide these *gopurams* into two classes. In one type, as in Plate 55A, the sloping sides are straight, firm and rigid. In this variety, the decoration of the surface is almost purely of an

Gopuram with straight sides and architectural motifs as decoration. [*Plate 55A*]

Gopuram with curved sides and figural sculpture as decoration. [Plate 55B]

architectural nature consisting of pillars, pilasters, arches, and mouldings. The other class of *gopuram* is seen in Plate 55B. The sloping sides are not straight, but curved and concave, so that the entire building has a soaring upward sweep. The roof at the top has a row of tall pinnacles. Here the surface decoration consists of figural sculpture and often the entire surface of the *gopuram* is covered with a bewildering array of figures, mostly over life-size. Some of the large *gopurams* have as many as 1000 carved figures, which gives an idea of the inexhaustible resources of Hindu mythology.

It is apparent, from the example of Srirangam, that the southern temples consist of an unsystematic complex of buildings. Certain elements within these temples, such as the pillared halls and the *gopurams* are of high artistic merit. However, unity and harmony of architectural form is lacking, and one always tends to think of the parts rather than of the whole. At the same time, one cannot fail to be impressed by the strong atmosphere of devotion and reverence in the southern temples. Worship undoubtedly came first, while decorative art to emphasize worship was secondary.

Plan of the Great Temple, Srirangam
(from History of Indian and Eastern Architecture by Fergusson)

The 4 inner courts. [Plate 56]

11

The Terrifying Gods of Tibet and Nepal

ANY VISITOR TO Delhi, wandering along the pavements of Jan Path, will come across a series of curio shops displaying purely Tibetan and Nepali handicrafts. Most of these art objects are so different from those you see elsewhere in India that you invariably stop for a closer look. Images of the Buddha, of course, you will see in profusion. But competing for attention, in almost equal numbers, are 'terrifying' images of Tibetan gods—images which make you wonder whether they are gods or demons. Why did the Tibetan mind picture its gods in such terrifying shapes and ferocious forms? The answer seems to lie mainly in the desolate and awesome nature of Tibet's climate and terrain which has been an important factor in shaping Tibetan culture.

Tibet is a vast and thinly populated country where small groups of people live separated from each other by stretches of arid, deserted land. It is a region of high awe-inspiring mountains, of wild rivers, of steep dangerous gorges and of immense silent deserts. It is also a land of icy winters, of sudden violent storms and of screeching winds. The grim and forbidding face of Nature, combined with the weird atmosphere created by climatic conditions, made the Tibetans preoccupied with the fearsome possibilities of their environment. All their hopes as well as fears were associated with it; it influenced not only their mind and character but also shaped their religion.

Chief among the fears to which the Tibetan mind was prone was the belief in the unseen presence of innumerable evil spirits and malevolent forces which were waiting to harm human beings. To overpower these forces and to protect the individual believer as well as his religion, the Tibetan created a set of wrathful and terrifying gods, who were all protective deities.. These gods were depicted as demoniacal-looking creatures with frightful countenances. They were credited with powers strong enough to scare away and destroy even the most powerful and hideous evil spirits. The fear-complex, then, was behind the creation of these Tibetan gods. Once created, these horrifying deities enslaved the minds of their creators.

Tibetan religion is known as Lamaism, and Lamaism is a combination of Buddhism and the indigenous beliefs of Tibet. According to tradition, Buddhism was introduced into Tibet in the seventh century A.D. by the two wives of the first great Tibetan ruler Songsten-gampo who established a unified Tibet. One of the wives was Chinese and the other Nepali. Throughout the centuries, Tibet has been influenced by both the Chinese and the Indo-Nepali traditions.

When Buddhism was first introduced, the Tibetans were a nomadic tribe, illiterate and superstitious. They believed strongly in a group of magical practices known as Bon. Fear was the main sentiment by which the Bon religion upheld its authority. It exploited the natural fears to which the Tibetan mind was susceptible, and held out magical powers as the means to dispel these fears. With such a background, the Tibetans were inclined to be hostile towards the imported Buddhism; they did not understand its profound doctrines and learned theories. The only way Buddhism could survive in such primitive surroundings was by incorporating some of Bon's chief concepts, specially its belief in magic. It is this combination of Buddhism and Bon, with the addition, in the course of centuries, of certain new gods and attitudes that finally came to be known as Lamaism.

The terrifying deity of Tibet is to be found in both Tibetan sculpture and painting. Plate 57 shows a bronze image of the demoniac god Yamantaka. The emphasis in the composition of these images is always on the diagonal, and movement is expressed through the use of sharp angles at the joints of the limbs. The artist has chosen to exaggerate the posture of the body to better express the god's inherent power and

energy. Yamantaka is always represented black and naked with his main head that of a buffalo. He has eight more heads, all awesome. Thirtyfour hands carry various objects including a drum and thunderbolt. With 16 legs, he tramples animals and demons on the right and birds and demons on the left. The bronze is also painted and is a striking example of the effective use of colour to emphasize the ferocious aspect of the god. Red, for example, is used for eyebrows and gaping mouth and for the eye sockets of all the skulls decorating Yamantaka's head-dress. Though depicting such a terrifying image, the bronze is yet a graceful conception and reveals the technical excellence of the craftsman. This particular image of Yamantaka is a masterpiece that belongs to the seventeenth century. If you observe closely you will see that Yamantaka is shown in sexual union with his Shakti (the female force) whom he holds with his two main arms.

Representation of gods in sexual embrace is a common theme in the art of Tibet, and such images are referred to as *yab-yum* which means father-mother. In India, sexual analogy has often been used in religious texts to give concrete shape to an abstract idea or metaphysical concept. Throughout the centuries Indian sages have tried to explain that God and the human soul were essentially the same and not two separate entities. They maintained that realisation of this truth led to enlightenment. Sexual symbolism was found to be the most expressive and vivid means of depicting this concept—the fundamental unity behind an apparent duality. The inner significance of the *yab-yum* images of Tibet was explained only to initiates into Lamaism; the images were not intended for public display. Not only the benevolent gods but quite frequently the terrifying gods also were depicted in the *yab-yum* posture as in the case of the bronze Yamantaka of Plate 57.

The demoniac gods were often represented in paintings too. Tibetan scroll paintings are known as *tankas*. The *tanka* was usually painted on cotton or linen of Indian or Nepali manufacture. A mixture of seven parts of chalk to one part of glue was applied to the cloth to smooth the surface. This was polished with shell and the cloth was then dried and stretched in a wooden frame. The colours were mostly local—red, yellow and blue from mineral rocks near Lhasa and black from the soot of pinewood. Indigo and red lac were from India. The colours were mixed with white

This 17th century Tibetan bronze is a masterly representation of the terrifying god Yaman taka with red paint used to highlight his ferocious character. [Plate 57]

This Tibetan painting (tanka) depicts the terrifying god Mahakala around whom other fearful gods are seen engaged in a gruesome dance. [*Plate 58*]

(chalk) and held in a suspension of glue. Some of the paintings have a remarkable sparkle due to the greater amount of glue used in the mixing of the colours.

Plate 58 shows us a *tanka* depicting the terrifying protective god Mahakala. Painted completely black, this god is shown draped in snake and tiger skins. He has a wide gaping mouth with fangs and his three

protruding eyes are awe-inspiring. Mahakala wears a crown of skulls and is also ornamented with garlands of skulls. With one hand he brandishes a sword, in another he holds a trident threaded with skulls, with a third he displays a skull cap, and in the fourth hand is a coconut. Mahakala is represented against a magnificent background of orange, yellow and brown flames. Around him are several other terrifying deities, each surrounded by his own halo of coloured flames, and seemingly engaged in a gruesome dance. Hayagriva, the chief of these fearful deities, is depicted directly below Mahakala, while painted above him is

This tanka depicts the goddess Lha Mo, one of the most horrifying of Tibetan deities, and the protective goddess of the city of Lhasa. [*Plate 59*]

This painting of the Buddhist god Mahisha-Samvara, god of protection against enemies comes from Nepal. [*Plate 60*]

Vajrasattva (the Adi-Buddha) shown in union with his Shakti and flanked by monks and *siddhas*.

The *tanka* of Plate 59 depicts the female deity Lha Mo, who is one of the most frightful of the terrifying gods. Lha Mo is the protective goddess of the capital city Lhasa. She is always shown seated on her mule which has a distinctive third eye in its flank. Her frightful face has a gaping fanged mouth in which she holds a corpse. Her headdress is composed of orange flames; she wears a crown of skulls and a garland of severed heads. In one hand she holds a skull cap filled with blood, and with the other she brandishes a club 'over the brains of those who have broken their promises'. Lha Mo is shown riding through a sea of blood in which float the dead bodies of the wicked whom she has destroyed. Behind her is a further background of brown and yellow flames, while in the fore ground are two of her equally hideous goddess companions. It seems possible that Lha Mo, who is said to live in cemeteries, was a deity of entirely Tibetan origin. One can quite imagine the effect of these *tankas* on the simple and unquestioning mind of the worshipper. The walls of Tibetan monasteries were decorated with these *tankas* and the dark interiors were lit by flickering oil lamps. As the worshipper entered, he saw only groups of terrifying deities engaged in weird and fantastic dances!

To a lesser extent, the terrifying deity appears in Nepal also. Perhaps because of the less compelling natural environment of Nepal, and because of the proximity to India and Indian ideas, the terrifying god never held as important a position here as in Tibet. Plate 60 shows us one of the most popular of the Buddhist guardian deities of Nepal—Mahisha-Samvara. He is invoked and worshipped in Nepal as a god of protection against enemies. He has nine heads in three rows of three, and the main head is that of a buffalo. He has 34 arms which hold skulls and impaled bodies and six of the arms are in an inner circle close to the body. His 16 legs can best be counted by numbering the claws on his toes. The world of animals and men is shown prostrate at his feet. There is a halo of burning flames around Mahisha-Samvara and surrounding the halo are 48 repetitions of the main figure, each with its own halo of flames. The modern eye, gazing at these strange but elegant compositions which are such riots of line and colour, sees mainly the hand of the sculptor

and painter. But to the devout Tibetan, it was his protective deity, 'terrifying' only because of its glory and power. To him the image represented a god who yielded to his prayers and entreaties and shielded him from all harm. There are various representations of other gods and goddesses too in Tibetan and Nepali art. but these 'terrifying' gods are both characteristic and unique.

12

Fatehpur Sikri : A Ghost Town

MORE THAN ANY other deserted site, Fatehpur Sikri, with its imposing sandstone monuments and its arrangement of spacious paved areas, creates an atmosphere of peaceful isolation. Viewing the surroundings from the top of the Panch Mahal or from Birbal's palace, it is easy to conjure up the world of Akbar with its pomp and luxury on the one hand and its note of humanity and religious tolerance on the other. Despite the lapse of 400 years, the warm red sandstone monuments standing on top of the stony Sikri hill are unweathered and well preserved due to the hot and exceptionally dry climate of the area.

These gracious monuments offer a silent contrast to the busy present day village, reminding us that a somewhat similar contrast must have existed when Akbar decided to build a new capital at this secluded site. What remains to-day in such perfect condition at Fatehpur Sikri consists of only the palace buildings and the mosque on top of the hill. The rest of the town, which once occupied a large area around the base of the hill, was built of perishable material and has not stood the test of time.

To appreciate in full the artistic achievement of Fatehpur Sikri, it is necessary to understand something of the complex personality of Akbar. In youth, Akbar's activities prepared him to be only a soldier and conqueror while all his later inclinations were those of a scholar and lover of art. Perhaps because he himself was illiterate, he grew to be specially conscious of the immense value of culture and learning. Akbar became

one of the greatest of Mughal patrons of art, literature, music, painting and architecture. His love of book-learning is evident in his collection of manuscripts and in his library numbering 24,000 volumes. Akbar's great and well-known religious tolerance, combined with his feeling for literature, led him to have both religious and literary works translated from Sanskrit, Turkish and Latin. His love of painting induced him to get painters to make illustrated copies of various works. His immense desire for fame and renown led him to commission Abul Fazl to write his biography. It also made him one of the greatest of Mughal builders, for architecture has indeed the most lasting claim as an aid to fame.

Akbar's desire to outshine all other rulers by his achievements in philosophy and religion, in art and architecture, was only intensified by 15 years of consolidated rule. He had already built himself a magnificent fort-palace at his capital of Agra. To strengthen his claim to artistic renown and to further display his imperial power, he now decided to build another and a more glorious capital city at Sikri.

The choice of Sikri as a site has an interesting story attached to it. At a time when Akbar was deeply concerned about the lack of an heir to his throne, the saint Salim Chisti living at Sikri predicted that he would have three sons. Later, when his wives were pregnant, Akbar sent them to the saint Salim at Sikri where his first two sons were born. His third son was born at the hermitage of another Chisti saint. Akbar felt deeply indebted to saint Salim Chisti and he decided to honour him by building his new capital at Sikri.

In 1571 stone masons and architects moved to the barren hill of hard red sandstone and in the course of the next 15 years the entire city appeared on the hill. It was named Fatehpur Sikri, the word Fatehpur meaning City of Victory. Akbar's eldest son Salim, named after the Chisti saint, and later known as Jehangir, writes:

> My revered father, regarding the village of Sikri, my birthplace, as fortunate to himself, made it his capital, and in the course of 14 or 15 years the hills and deserts, which abounded in beasts of prey, became converted into a magnificent city, comprising numerous gardens, elegant edifices and other places of

great attraction and beauty. After the conquest of Gujarat, the village was named Fatehpur (the town of victory).

Akbar had made a study of the tenets and philosophy of many religions including Hinduism, Christianity and Zoroastrianism. He gradually moved away from orthodox Islam and announced a religion of his own known as Din-i-ilahi or Religion of God. The keynote of this religion was its attitude of deep tolerance arising out of what has been labelled Akbar's 'vague and mystical liberalism'. By marrying Hindu wives and allowing them to practise Hindu rites and to celebrate Hindu festivals within the palace confines, Akbar had won the affection and trust of several Hindu rulers and vassals. These rulers willingly co-operated in the emperor's building activities not only by offering monetary tribute, but also by sending skilled artisans from their kingdoms to Sikri. This helped Akbar to erect the entire group of buildings at Sikri in a short span of time. The distinct styles of these various groups of artisans are clearly seen in some of the buildings at the site. Akbar was equally tolerant of Portuguese missionaries and took great interest in their teachings, even engraving the words of Christ on the main gateway to the Great Mosque at Sikri.

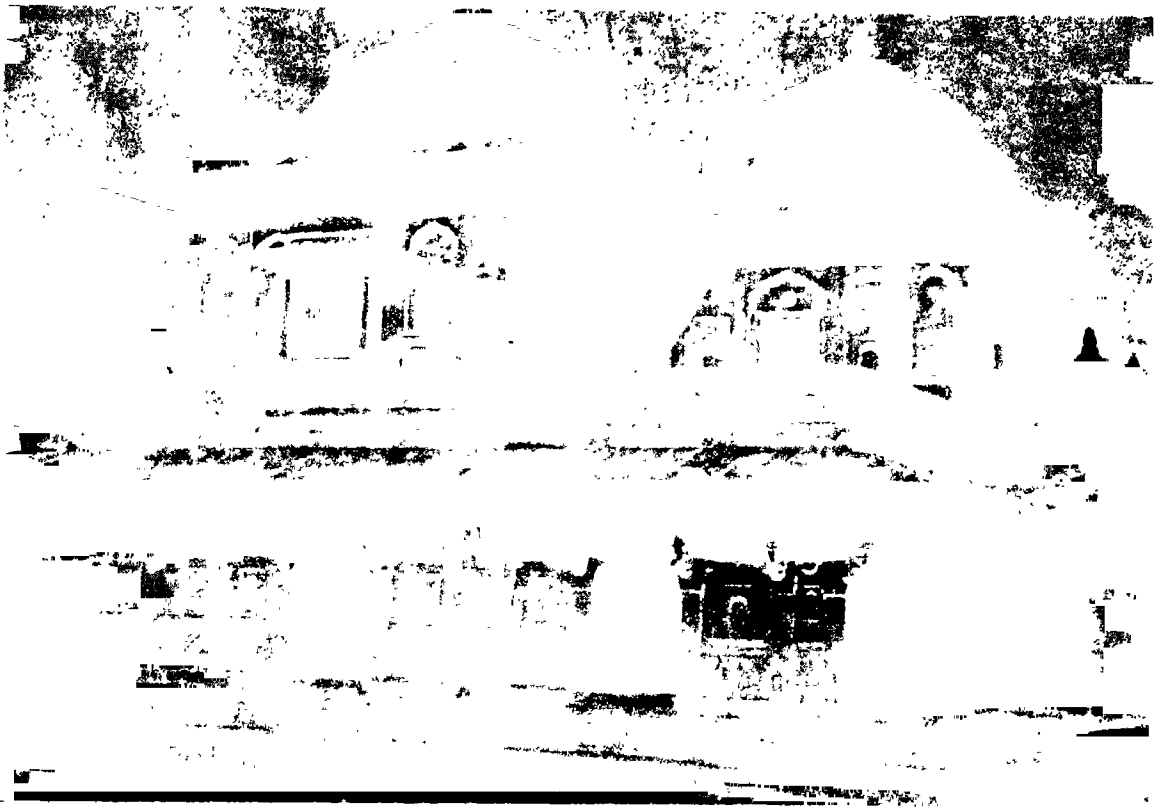
The advent of the Muslims into India had brought about major changes in the art and architecture of the country. With Islam came the new concept of the mosque as a place of worship. The mosque is a spacious, open and airy structure, while the Hindu shrine is usually dark, enclosed and incense-laden. In contrast to Hindu art, all decorative carving in Muslim architecture had to be floral or geometric, figural representation being taboo in Islam. This tradition was strictly observed in orthodox Islamic countries, but the Indian stone carver often took the liberty of introducing a bird or animal into his relief motifs. (Luckily the Mughal painter did not feel bound by the orthodox tradition).

While Hindu inscriptions merely served a practical purpose such as that of recording facts regarding the foundation of a temple, the Muslims made an art of calligraphy, and decorative lettering occupied a place of importance on Muslim monuments. It was also a special characteristic of the Muslims to enliven bare stone walls with the application of painted plaster and with an inlay of glazed tiles, marble and precious stones.

Patterned effects were often achieved by using marble of different colours for the mural decorations.

The Muslims also introduced new methods of building. The use of mortar as a cementing agent gave a wider range to the builders' art, while the principle of the arch made it unnecessary to span all open spaces by beams placed across pillars. Large unpillared halls now became possible. In addition, a completely new type of structure, the tomb, began to be built. The Hindus raised no monument for their dead because of their practice of cremation, followed by immersion of the ashes. The Muslims who buried their dead, made the tomb into a major architectural monument. The Islamic style gave a fresh perspective to Indian architecture and domed structures began to appear everywhere, giving a new look to the skyline of the country.

Although various regional influences may be seen in the architecture of Fatehpur Sikri, there is, nevertheless, an essential uniformity of style that leaves no doubt that there existed a single master architect in charge of the planning of the entire city. Fatehpur Sikri consists of two well-separated sections: the palace area consisting of buildings separated by arrangements of spacious paved grounds, and the mosque area. While the palace buildings reveal a combination of Hindu and Islamic styles, the Great Mosque is constructed on almost purely Muslim principles. From a distance the eye registers a uniform picture of red sandstone, while the impression left on the mind by the sweep of buildings is one of regal grandeur. It is only on a much closer view that the wealth of decoration emerges.

The palace area consists of numerous and varied structures both administrative and residential. The palace of Birbal is a gracious domed building in two stories. Whether it ever belonged to Birbal, Akbar's famous friend and adviser, is a matter of doubt. The upper storey with its two diagonally-placed rooms opening on either side on to terraces enclosed by low parapets would suggest rather that the palace was occupied by Akbar's two senior queens Salima and Rukiya. [Plate 61] An interesting feature in the construction is a curious system of double-roofing, obviously intended to keep the interior cool. The carving on the walls and niches and on the ceilings and pillars is profuse, elaborate

This graceful building, popularly known as Birbal's palace, was the residence of two of Akbar's senior queens. [Plate 61]

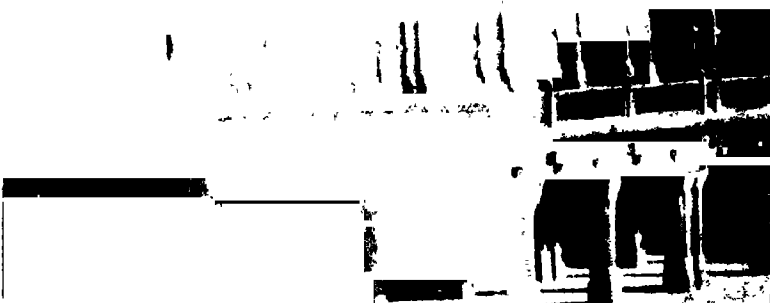
and varied and certainly imparts a special character, besides adding to the general attraction of Birbal's palace. This detailed decorative work is strongly Hindu in style.

The Panch Mahal, an open building in five stories, is impressive in its complex arrangement of elegant pillars. Each floor diminishes in size ending in a single domed pavilion which gives the structure a delicate and finished look. The first floor has 84 pillars, the second 56, the third 20, and the fourth 12, while the uppermost is the single pavilion. The pillars and their brackets are remarkably varied in general design as well as in decorative work. In fact, no two pillars on the second floor are alike. The Panch Mahal, apparently an equivalent of the Persian *badgir* or 'wind-catcher', was a palace where the ladies of the court could relax, while the cool summer breezes played around them. [Plate 62]

The Sunehra Makan (Golden House), popularly known as Maryam's house, is a small and comparatively undistinguished building. Once upon a time, however, it was splendidly decorated with wall paintings

in which gold was lavishly used. These paintings were Persian in style and represented the very early stages of Mughal painting. Except for the carpet designs on some ceilings, all that now remains of these frescoes is the faded outline of a few figures and scattered patches of decorative lettering. It is indeed difficult to imagine their one-time glory.

The pavilion known as the Turkish Sultana's house, with its trellis-work parapet on the flat roof, seems to have been a chamber for discussions, rather than a residential house. Badauni tells us that an important religious debate took place one night in 1575 in the Chamber of the Anup Talao. Apparently, the reference is to this pavilion with the pool in front. The building is small and modest and consists of a single room contained within pillared verandahs. The simplicity of this design provides an appropriate background for the detailed decorative carving which

The Panch Mahal is remarkable for its complex arrangement of pillars which are elaborately ornamented. This open structure was the equivalent of the Persian badgir or 'wind-catcher'. [*Plate 62*]

An example of the delicate floral carving that appears on the walls of the pavilion popularly known as the Turkish Sultana's house. [Plate 63]

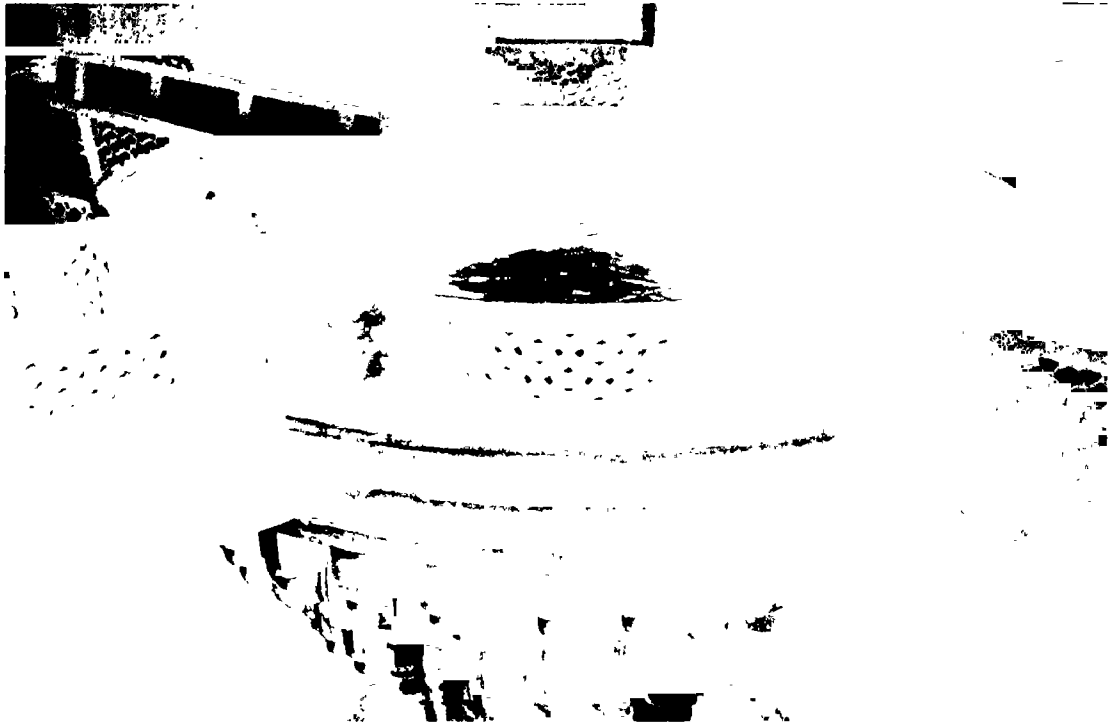
covers every inch of the wall surfaces. [Plate 63] Gazing at the delicate floral patterns surrounded by borders of geometric design, one can understand why the pavilion has been described as a 'superb jewel casket'. The simple method of construction as also the abundance of this particular type of shallow carving, brings to mind the tradition of the wood worker. It appears probable that the craftsmen who built this exquisite pavilion came from either the Punjab or Kashmir, where woodwork, at that time, was a predominant and living craft.

The largest of Sikri's residential buildings is known as Jodh Bai's palace. It corresponds to Abul Fazl's description of the palace occupied by Akbar's Rajput wives, and in which Akbar occasionally performed the Hindu sacrifice known as *homa*. Jodh Bai's palace consists of four structures on the four sides of an open rectangular area measuring 320

The facade of the Diwan-i-Khas acquires its look of distinction from the elegant domed kiosks on the roof. (Plate 64)

feet by 215 feet. These buildings are enclosed and connected by a wall 30 feet high and include an impressive entrance gateway, a Hindu temple and a Hawa Mahal with exquisitely cut stone trellis screens. Here the ladies could relax in cool comfort, while through the delicate trellis-work they could get a pleasing view of the outside, remaining themselves unobserved. In the days when the floors were richly carpeted and bolstered with silken cushions, and when attendant maids glided to and fro laden with trays of *pan* and sweetmeats, it must have presented a picture of colourful luxury. The architectural influence of Islam is apparent in the domes and in the application of vivid blue glazed tiles to some of the roofs. However, its niches, brackets, pa and hanging balconies, and its richly carved ornamentation, shows un-mistakable resemblance to the temple architecture of western India. It seems as though the master architect entrusted the construction of this palace to a guild of craftsmen from Gujarat.

Of the administrative buildings, the most important is the Diwan-i-Khas, the Hall of Private Audience. The exterior is rectangular in plan and is in two stories. Giving the structure a distinctive look are the four small pillared kiosks placed at the corners of the terraced roof. [Plate 64] The interior arrangements of the Diwan-i-Khas are so unusual and unique that it seems certain it was designed according to the instructions of Akbar himself. The interior, basically a single chamber, has a large substantial pillar in the centre with a massive expanding capital that supports a circular stone platform above. The concept seems to be that of a spreading tree. The patterned pillar branches out at the top into a series of 36 decorated brackets, set closely together and supporting the 'throne' platform above. This central platform is connected to galleries

[illegible] with its ex- [illegible] capital is the focal [illegible] the interior of [illegible] Khas. It sup- [illegible] platform [illegible] is pre- Akbar [illegible] in darbar. [illegible]]

The 'throne' platform above the central pillar in the 'Diwan-i-Khas', and the 'bridges' connecting it to the galleries. [*Plate 66*]

along the sides by stone 'bridges' with lattice-work railings. [Plates 65 and 66.] The exact purpose of this remarkable building remains in some doubt. It seems likely, however, that Akbar conceived this curious design because he wished to hold private darbar, seated in a prominent position on the central platform, with his representatives in the galleries around. Those who did not intend to participate in the discussions perhaps gathered below.

The mosque area at Fatehpur Sikri consists of the mosque itself, the great southern gateway known as the Buland Darwaza and the small tomb of the saint Salim Chisti within the courtyard. The mosque, which covers an area of 542 feet by 438 feet, is one of the largest, most finished and typical of its kind. It is conventional in design and consists of a wide open courtyard with pillared walks on three sides, with the sanctuary at the western end facing Mecca. The courtyard gives a sense of great dignity and spaciousness, and arranged all along the parapets

The Bulana Darwaza leading into the Great Mosque at Sikri, rises to an imposing height of 176 feet. [Plate 67]

are a series of small pillared and domed kiosks, creating a most pleasing effect. Jehangir tells us that on holy days and anniversaries the kiosks were wrapped in coloured cloth and lamps were lit within. The sanctuary is composed of various interior compartments crowned by domes. Its decoration consists of painted, carved and inlaid work for which Akbar seems to have called into play the resources of the best craftsmen of the day. The diversity of patterns used in the decoration of the walls is remarkable. 'It is as if the artists had taken as their model the pages of an exquisitely illuminated manuscript and enlarged these with their jewelled geometry of line and colour to enrich the spaces on the walls'.

Some years after the construction of this mosque, Akbar wished to commemorate one of his victories by erecting a triumphal archway. He chose the southern entrance to the mosque and built there the imposing Buland Darwaza or Gate of Magnificence. [Plate 67] The gateway, 130 feet wide, is approached by 42 steps and rises 134 feet above the top step, so that the entire structure is 176 feet from ground level. Seen from the ground, the massive dignity of the Buland Darwaza is awe-inspiring in its grandeur. In the broad rectangular border formation on the central face of the gateway is a continuous ornamental inscription. This calligraphic border with its beautiful lettering is of impressive size. Among its messages it contains the following words indicative of Akbar's religious broadmindedness:

> Jesus, Son of Mary, on whom be peace, said: The world is a bridge; Pass over it; But build no house upon it. Who hopes for an hour, hopes for eternity. The world is an hour. Spend it in prayer, for the rest is unseen.

The exquisite white marble tomb of the saint Salim Chisti produces a complete change of mood. [Plate 68] Originally the tomb appears to have been a small red sandstone structure, only partly faced with marble. It was probably at the end of Jehangir's reign that the major portion of the marble work was added and the tomb achieved its effect of extreme elegance. The delicacy of treatment makes the marble look almost like carved ivory. The walls of the square exterior are composed of beautiful perforated screens bound by pillars with lattice-work capitals which create a honeycomb appearance. The tomb chamber within is circular

The tomb of the saint Salim Chisti within the courtyard of the Great Mosque. Its white marbled elegance is in striking contrast to the red sandstone of the Mosque buildings. [*Plate 68*]

and measures 16 feet in diameter with a low dome above. Placed over the tomb is a richly decorated canopy made of ebony, almost completely covered with glistening pieces of mother-of-pearl cut in various shapes. The floor and walls of the chamber are paved with marble inlaid with coloured stones.

Fatehpur Sikri has been described as a 'brief but brilliant story'. Once humming with life and adorned with cool fountains, green gardens and pleasure pavilions, it stood as a symbol of Akbar's most creative years.

During those twelve years (A.D. 1574 to A.D. 1586) of rich activity, Akbar's manuscripts were copied, his biographies and translations were completed, his miniatures were painted, and his elaborate administrative machinery was set in motion. In 1586 Akbar moved his court to the Punjab and when he returned in 1598, he established himself at Agra and not at Fatehpur Sikri.

Varied conjectures have been made as to why Akbar deserted his favourite city, built with such effort and enthusiasm. The most popular theory is that of the failure of the city's water supply, and certainly the artificial lake two miles long and a mile wide, built by Akbar, did dry up. On the other hand, since there is ample evidence of an almost foolproof water supply system comprising storage tanks and channels, one feels that the explanation for the desertion of Fatehpur Sikri must lie elsewhere, hidden in the folds of Akbar's complex personality. For some unknown reason, he seems to have failed to hear again the call of Sikri which, almost overnight, became a ghost town.

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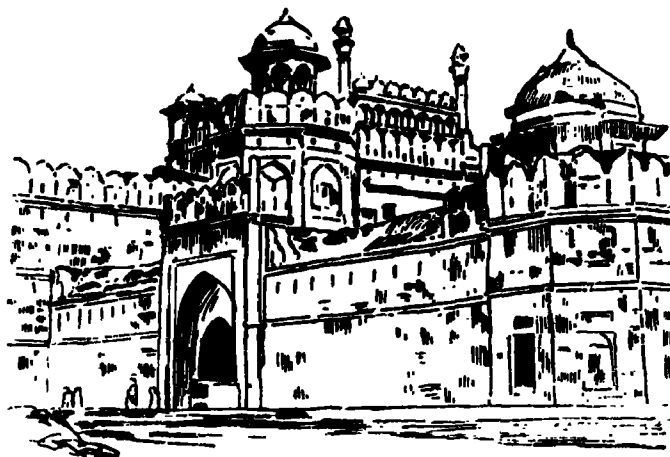

Rajput Miniature Painting : A Synthesis of Hindu and Muslim

INCLUDED IN THE collection of the National Museum, New Delhi, is the exquisite Rajput miniature seen in Plate 69, showing a girl feeding a black buck. The peace and serenity which immediately establishes itself as the predominant note of this painting is common to all Kangra miniatures. Indeed, the tranquillity of the Kangra valley itself seems to emerge from the delicate tracery of the picture and from its cool blues, pale greens and soft mauves. The beauty of the Kangra valley women with their fine features, large gentle eyes and graceful figures is also reflected in Kangra miniatures, often, as in this instance, forming their sole theme. Seated on a willow tree, the girl in the picture is holding a branch in one hand and feeding a buck with the other. Like all the women of Kangra miniatures, she is wearing a high-waisted dress which adds to the effect of grace and elegance. The delicate sweeping lines of the willow tree seem to echo the rhythmic curves of the girl's figure. The drawing is fine and precise, and the delicacy of treatment is typical.

This miniature was painted around A.D. 1800 in the state of Kangra, which was then under the rule of Sansar Chand (A.D. 1775 to A.D. 1823). Some 30 years before Sansar Chand came to the throne, artists from Delhi, fearing the consequences of Nadir Shah's invasion of India, took refuge in the area of the Punjab hills. These artists laid the foundation of the Kangra school of painting. Sansar Chand, who was a keen patron

of arts, surrounded himself with poets, story-tellers and skilled artists, with talented singers and dancing girls. The years of his reign were among the most glorious in the history of Kangra.

Why are these paintings known as miniatures ? Obviously because of their specially small size. The average miniature measures some eight inches by six inches, and the Girl feeding the Black Buck of Plate 69 is reproduced in its actual size. The art of transferring colour on to such small-size manuscripts of leaf or paper began around A.D. 900. All earlier painting in India—and painting had flourished from very ancient times—had been confined entirely to the decoration of walls. The earliest miniatures were painted on long narrow strips of palm-leaf. These strips were about three inches wide and a foot in length. The left-hand corner of these strips contained a painting about three inches square, while the remaining nine inches was occupied by a text, to which the painting was an illustration. Holes were punched in each strip and the entire lot was held together by a string. These horizontal palm-leaf manuscripts were exclusively religious texts.

With the coming of the Muslims these manuscripts assumed the upright format which is the normal practice today. This format was derived from the Persian method of book illustration which was followed in the Mughal courts of India from the fifteenth century onwards. Miniature painting received great encouragement during the reign of the emperor Akbar who is said to have employed more than 100 painters, most of them Hindus. These painters worked under the supervision of two Persian master artists. Contemporary records tell us that the emperor Akbar regularly examined the work of the painters and conferred rewards according to merit. Miniature painting continued to be patronized by the emperors Jehangir and Shah Jehan in whose reigns some magnificent illustrated texts were produced. The decline, however, began soon after, and when Nadir Shah of Persia invaded India and occupied Delhi in 1738, artists dispersed to various parts of the country including Rajasthan and the Punjab hills. In the many small Rajput states of this area, there existed a tradition of miniature painting. which had already imbibed earlier Mughal influences. Artists from the Mughal court who now sought patronage in these Rajput states, seem to have increased the enthusiasm for miniature painting and given it fresh impetus. Some of the finest examples of Indian miniatures now came from these areas.

Painted around A.D. 1800, this Kangra miniature depicts a girl feeding a black buck.

[Plate 60]

Rajput miniatures were painted during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and are the result of the intermingling of Muslim and Hindu cultures. The style of the painting often reveals Muslim influence, while the spirit and subject-matter are purely Hindu.

The miniatures mainly depict episodes from the legend of Krishna and miniature after miniature was produced in the Rajput courts portraying Krishna and his romantic adventures with the *gopis*. Radha and Krishna were considered to be symbols of the human soul and God, Radha's longing for Krishna being a means of expressing the soul's longing for God. Since very early times in India, the ecstasy of the love of man and woman had been considered to be the closest analogy to the soul's delight in God. The Rajput rulers were followers of the Vallabhacharya cult which held that God was to be found, not in ascetic denial, but in the very midst of worldly pleasures.

In addition to these miniatures that interpret human love in terms of the divine, there are many that portray scenes from contemporary love-poetry and depict woman's capacity for love, quite apart from any religious significance. This was a favourite theme of Indian poetry, two of the most famous poems in this category being the Sanskrit *Rasamanjari* of Bhanu Datta and the Hindi *Rasika Priya* of Keshav Das. Krishna worship, with its emphasis on the longing for the Divine Lover, inspired this romantic literature, which in turn was reflected in Rajput painting. Part of the preoccupation and repeated depiction in miniature paintings of women yearning for their lovers may also be traced to the particular character of Rajput society. It must be remembered that being a warlike people, Rajput men were often away on the battlefield, leaving their women alone for long periods.

The Rajput artists used for their paintings a thick handmade paper prepared from cotton, bamboo and jute. Several sheets of this paper were gummed together to provide a base and often, old, used paper formed the lower layers. Brushes were made from the hair of the squirrel's tail and the outline was first drawn with this fine brush. A coating of white colour was applied over the whole, after which the outline was redrawn. The paper was polished with a rounded stone and the colours were then applied.

The Rajput artists used a wide variety of shades ranging from the strong pure colours of the Basohli paintings to the soft mauves and powdery

blues of Kangra. Blue was from imported lapis lazuli and yellow was obtained from a sulphide of arsenic. Red was derived from various sources—from red ochre, iron oxide and cochineal. Gold was derived from gold leaf. Several coatings of colour were applied. After each application the colour was allowed to dry, then polished, and then another coat of the same colour was applied. This was done several times. Gold and silver were added last, not with the usual brush, but with a bear's or a tiger's claw. The human figures were painted last, after the entire background had been completed. Finally, the outline which was blurred by the process of colouring, was redrawn in black.

There are several categories of Rajput miniatures, each associated with a different Rajput court. Each style has its own special mode of depicting human figure and features. Four of the most distinctive styles are the Kangra and Basohli from the Punjab hills, and the Kishangarh and Bundi from Rajasthan.

The state of Basohli which, like Kangra, is also in the Punjab hills, produced, however, a style of miniature painting which is in complete contrast to that of Kangra. Basohli painting makes its impact because of its primitive directness and its strong sense of movement. There is no search here for line perfection, but rather an attempt to depict simple blocked-out shapes. This is clearly seen in Plate 70 depicting a scene from the *Dana-Lila*. The story goes that Krishna and his companions used to waylay the *gopis* and demand a kiss as the fee (*dana*) for allowing them to proceed. This was usually willingly given! If the *gopis* refused, their veils were drawn off and a kiss snatched, often resulting in the breaking of their milk pots.

The treatment of the feminine face in Basohli paintings is unusual. The women have rounded receding foreheads, predominantly large eyes and big rounded chins. Their hair usually falls in long wavy tresses and they wear richly patterned clothes. The figures are invariably bejewelled: raised white paint is used to show up pearl necklaces, while pieces cut from shining beetles' wings highlight the green of emerald ornaments. The emphasis is on colours like red, mustard and blue, and when trees are painted, they are highly stylised. The general effect of the Basohli style contains a suggestion of something wild and primitive.

Painting in the small state of Basohli seems to have developed during the reign of Sangram Pal (A.D. 1635 to A.D. 1673). The distinctive Basohli

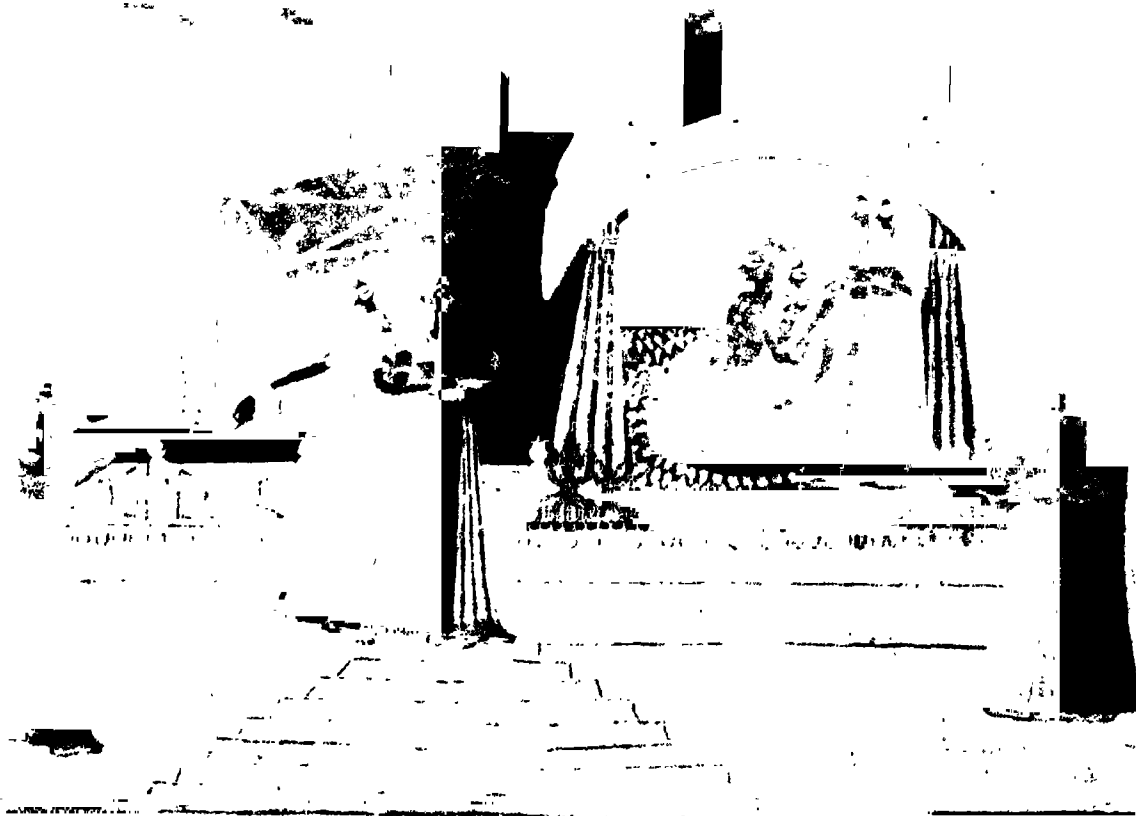
This scene from the Dana Lila is a Basohli miniature belonging to around A.D. 1700. It shows one of Krishna's companions snatching away the veil of a gopi who has apparently refused the dana of a kiss. [*Plate 70*]

style, while revealing both Mughal and Rajasthani influences, is yet different from both. One is led to assume that there must have existed a local tradition of painting which has not yet been clearly traced. The Mughal clothes, which are typical of the Basohli miniatures, were probably an influence of Sangram Pal's visit to the court of Shah Jehan. The spirit of the paintings, however, has nothing in common with the Mughal tradition. The Basohli style reached its most expressive phase in the reign of Kirpal Pal (A.D. 1678 to A.D. 1693) who was a great patron of art and literature, and it is to this period that our *Dana-Lila* miniature belongs.

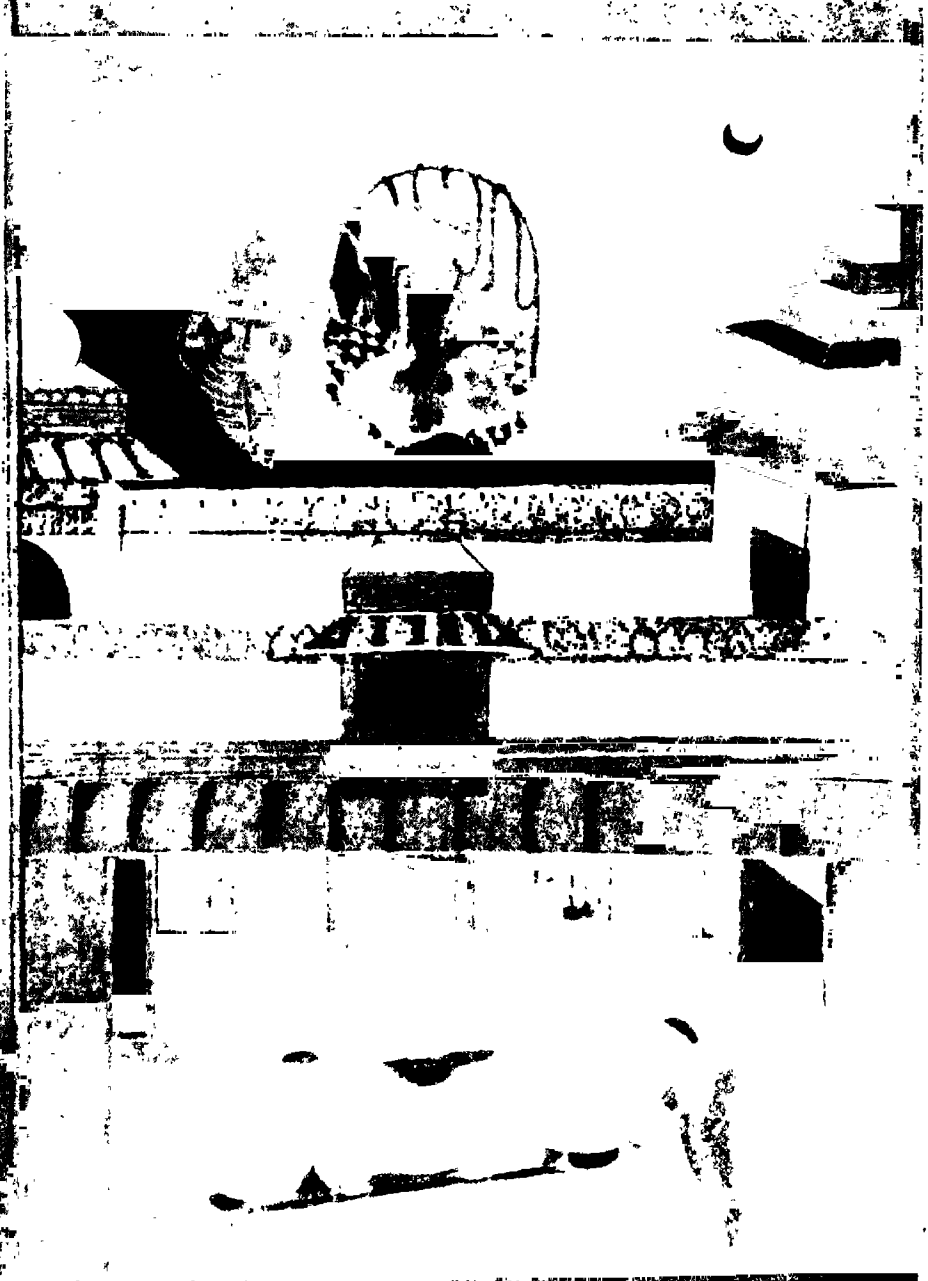
From Rajasthan proper come the Kishangarh miniatures which are among the most beautiful and elegant paintings of India. The small state of

Kishangarh, which lies between Jaipur and Ajmer, was founded by Kishan Singh in 1611. It was during the reign of Sawant Singh who came to the throne in 1748 that Kishangarh's most exquisite series of miniatures were painted. These miniatures derive in theme and spirit as well as in style from the personalities of the ruler Sawant Singh and his chief artist Nihal Chand. Sawant Singh was a patron of art and was himself a poet. Under the name of Nagaridas he wrote a whole series of lyrics on the Krishna theme. He was also inspired by his love for Bani Thani (Bewitching Lady of Fashion), a young singer who was maid to his step-mother and who soon became his mistress. Their mutual devotion was a long and lasting one, and Bani Thani was certainly the living model for his exquisite descriptions of the divine Radha:

> Her face is gleaming like the brightness of the sun.
> High arched, twin pencilled eyebrows hover on her brow
> like black bees over a lily pond,
> And her dark tresses fall here and there like the
> curling tendrils of a creeper.
> Bejewelled is her nose, curved and sharp like the
> thrusting saru [cypress] plant,
> And her lips have formed a gracious bow parting into
> a queenly smile.

The artist Nihal Chand was able to capture the spirit of his master's lyricism and translate it faithfully in terms of line and colour. He also had at his command every technique of Mughal painting. The fine features, oval face and slim bodies of Radha and Krishna as depicted by Nihal Chand were undoubtedly stylised and idealistic portraits of the royal lovers. Thus arose the distinctiveness of the Kishangarh Radha-Krishna, with their elongated faces, firmly cut-back foreheads and sharp pointed noses. The eyes are invariably long and curved upwards, and the eyebrows descend from a bold arch. The lips are thin and sensitive and the chin slender and pointed. Radha has long tresses and her face is framed by a curl of hair. She wears a fine gold-embroidered wrap. The equally elegant Krishna is painted pale blue and wears an orange turban. The effect of delicacy is further stressed by the pearls and pale emeralds which go to make up their jewellery.

Belonging to the middle of the 18th century, this elegant Kishangarh miniature depicts Radha and Krishna seated in a pavilion on a marble terrace, with attendant maids grouped around them. [*Plate 71*]

The refined drawing and expressive lines of the Kishangarh style may be seen in Plate 71 which depicts Radha and Krishna seated in a pavilion on a marble terrace, attended by a group of maids. Nihal Chand gloried in painting Radha-Krishna and the *gopis* gliding through lush green gardens, sailing in red boats on a blue lake, or sitting on white marble terraces. The elegant pillars of the pavilion with their detailed decorative treatment are a constantly recurring feature of Kishangarh paintings. The trees with their circularly grouped foliage are also typical. Kishangarh miniatures depict a great deal of landscape, making lavish use of green against sunset skies of vermilion and gold.

The vibrant paintings of Bundi, also from Rajasthan, strike a different note. The state of Bundi lies a little north of Udaipur and painting

This Bundi miniature, belonging to around A.D. 1760, illustrates the Rasika Priya of Keshav Das. [*Plate 72*]

commenced there during the reign of the Rajput ruler Rao Chattar Sal (A.D. 1631 to A.D. 1659), who was made governor of Delhi by the Mughal emperor Shah Jehan. The close association of the Bundi rulers with the Mughal court is evident in the early paintings. In the reign of the next two rulers, the typical Bundi style emerges and reaches its finest form under the ruler Unmed Singh who ruled from A.D. 1749 to A.D. 1771.

Plate 72 shows us a miniature illustrating a verse from the *Rasika Priya* of Keshav Das, a Hindi poem which deals extensively with the theme of heroes and heroines and their classification. The painting is divided into two sections. The upper portion shows Krishna seated in the centre on a lotus with Radha beside him, while the scene below depicts Radha with two attendant maids. Fine line drawing is characteristic of the Bundi style. The women of the Bundi style have receding foreheads and chins, strong noses, deeply curved eyebrows, narrow eyes, thin lips and full cheeks. They have small breasts and long slim bodies.

The date palms and plantains that are predominant in the landscape are typical of the Bundi countryside. The detailed treatment of architecture reveals the influence of the Mughal tradition. The Bundi artist had a special fondness for painting carpet designs in great detail. He also liked using brilliant colours, effectively placing pure reds, yellows and greens against deep blue skies dotted with stars and a crescent moon.

Rajput artists strictly adhered to the traditions of the school of painting in which they had been trained. Even in instances where an individual touch is seen, the style rarely moves away from the basic principles laid down by its particular school. Rajput miniature painting was definitely a court art which flourished in an atmosphere of royal patronage. Though the themes of the miniatures came mainly from the stories and legends widely prevalent among the people, the common man had little opportunity to appreciate the paintings themselves which remained confined to the royal courts.

Notes and Acknowledgements

Chapter 1

Several books on Indian art suggest that the Sanchi stupa was decorated sometime in the first century A.D. In my opinion, the decoration belongs to between B.C. 50 to B.C. 25. I have discussed, in some detail, the points in favour of such a dating in my book *Early Buddhist Rock Temples*, London, 1972.

Chapters 2 & 3

Walter Spink of the University of Michigan has been doing extensive work on the rock-cut architecture of India. In chapters 2 and 3 of this book, I have followed Spink's recently presented analysis on the development of these caves. I find myself more in agreement with Spink's views regarding their dating than with those of Percy Brown, whose theories have been widely accepted until today. See Spink, "Ajanta to Ellora", *Marg*, 1967 and Spink, "Ajanta and Ghototkacha, a Preliminary Analysis," *Arts Orientalis*, vol. 6.

Chapter 5

For several decades, Jouveau Dubreuil's theory of the development of the site of Mahabalipuram, as extending over the reigns of four Pallava rulers, has not been questioned by art historians. In my chapter on Mahabalipuram, however, I have presented the recent view put forward by R. Nagaswamy (Tamil Nadu Department of Archaeology), who has argued that Mahabalipuram was built during the reign of a single Pallava ruler. See R. Nagaswamy's "New Light on Mahabalipuram", *Transactions of the Archaeological Society of South India*, 1960-62.

Chapters 9 & 10

Percy Brown's insight into the art of the Hoysalas, and his analysis of the development of the south Indian temple, remain unchallenged. I would like to record my indebtedness to the relevant sections of his volume *Indian Architecture: Buddhist and Hindu*, on which I have based chapters 9 and 10 of my book.

Chapter 11

There are few authoritative as well as lucid works on the art of Tibet. The monograph written by Pratapaditya Pal (Los Angeles County Museum of Art) is certainly one such work, and I have drawn heavily on it for my own brief discussion on the Tibetan gods. See P. Pal, *The Art of Tibet*, Asia Society, New York, 1969.

Chapter 13

Much discussion centres around the subject of Rajput miniature painting, and particularly on the origins of the various schools and the influences that shaped them. I have relied on Karl Khandalavala's scholarly publication *Pahari Miniature Painting*, and have also drawn on Galbraith and Randhawa's *Rajput Painting*.

The permission given by the under-mentioned institutions to reproduce photographic material in this book is gratefully acknowledged:

1. *Nataraja* on the cover—National Museum, New Delhi and Department of Atomic Energy, Bombay.

2. Tibetan Paintings of *Mahakala* (plate 58) and *Lha Mo* (plate 59)—National Museum of Ethnology, Leiden, The Netherlands.

3. *Mahisha-Samvara* (plate 60)—National Art Gallery, His Majesty's Government of Nepal, Bhaktapur, Nepal.

4. Other photographs—Archaeological Survey of India, Government of India, New Delhi.

Glossary

abhaya mudra	hand gesture of reassurance
akshamala	rosary; string of beads always seen in the hands of an image of Brahma
alasa kanya	term used to describe carvings in the Odissi temples of girls in various leisurely postures
apsara	heavenly maiden
apsidal	the semi-circular or inverted-U-shaped end of a building; applied particularly to the Buddhist temple
arcade	a long passage or gallery, usually with arched ceiling
balcony	projecting platform enclosed by wall or railing, on the outside of a building
base	lower portion of any structure whether building or pillar
beam	long piece of stone or wood, laid across pillars
bhumi-sparsa mudra	earth-touching gesture of the hands, particularly of the Buddha
bodhisattva	a being capable of becoming a Buddha, but who chooses to remain in this world to help other beings towards Buddhahood; an intermediary between man and Buddha
bodhi tree	tree under which the Buddha obtained enlightenment
bracket	a projecting support, often ornamental
calligraphy	decorative lettering
canopy	covering above a niche
capital	upper portion of a pillar
ceiling	inner covering surface of building, below the roof
cell	small residential room in a monastery
chaitya	a Buddhist temple
chakra	a wheel, always seen in the hands of a Vishnu image

chapel	a temple ; a place of worship
colonnade	a series of columns or pillars
column	pillar
court	an enclosed space
deity	a god
enlightenment	realisation of the ultimate meaning of life on earth
excavation	hollowed out of rock or earth
facade	front view of a building
fresco	wall painting on a plastered surface
frieze	a band or border of decoration, usually horizontal, on the wall of a temple or other structure
gallery	a long covered passage
gana	dwarf-like attendant of Siva
gopuram	ornamental gateway tower of the south Indian temple
high relief	deep carving in which the figures stand out prominently from the background
Hinayana	early form of Buddhism as taught by the Buddha himself, in which the Buddha was not considered as God
inscription	writing on stone, metal or clay
jamb	the side frame of door or window
Jataka	stories of the previous lives of the Buddha
kalasa	vase-like structure crowning the spire of a Siva temple
kapala	skull-cap
kiosk	small decorative pillared pavilion with a domed roof
linga	an emblem of Siva ; a phallic emblem
low relief	shallow carving in which the figures stand out only slightly from the background
Mahayana	Later form of Buddhism in which the Buddha was worshipped as God
mandapa	an open hall
monolith	a single rock shaped into a building, pillar or other object
mortar	mixture of lime, sand and water for joining stones or bricks
mudra	gesture of the hands and fingers
mural	wall decoration, usually painting
naga	serpent-being associated with the waters

nagini	female serpent-being associated with the waters
Nandi	the bull of Siva
narrative sculpture	sculpture depicting an entire story
niche	a hollow portion in the wall intended for a statue or other ornament
nirvana	term used by the Buddhists for enlightenment
panel	a section of a wall, usually recessed, and containing decorative carving
parapet	flat projecting surface often enclosed by a railing, at various levels of a building
pavilion	an open roofed building
pilaster	a pillar that is attached to the wall
pinnacle	slender spire-like structure on the top of a building
plan	floor-plan; horizontal section of a building showing the distribution of its various parts
porch	an open roofed entrance to a shrine, usually pillared
pradakshina patha	processional passage built around the object of worship
prakaram	open courtyard to be found in the south Indian temple
ratha	a chariot used in connection with temple ceremonies ; a term used to describe the monolithic temples of Mahabalipuram
relief carving	carving attached to stone or wood surface, and only partly projecting from that surface
rock-cut	cut out of the solid rock of a mountainside
sanctum	the most sacred part of a temple; the shrine in which the image of the god is placed
sankha	conch-shell always seen in the hands of a Vishnu image
Shakti	female force; the feminine counterpart of a god
shrine	the most sacred part of the temple in which the image of the god is placed; the term is also used to describe a small temple
shrine tower	tower above the sanctuary containing the image of the god
siddha	saint
sikhara	tower or spire above the shrine
storey	a level of a building
structural	built by piling up stone or bricks (as distinct from rock-cut)
stupa	structure shaped like a mound, and containing within it relics of the Buddha or of the disciples, or merely marking a sacred spot
superstructure	upper portion of a structure

tanka	Tibetan or Nepali painting on cloth
terrace	an open, flat roof-top; a veranda
trench	a deep narrow cut in rock or earth
Trinity	a group of three; Trimurti, applied usually to Brahma-Vishnu-Siva; can also refer to three aspects of Siva himself
urna	tuft of hair between the eyebrows of Buddha images
usnisa	protuberance on the skull of the Buddha, indicating his super-human status
utsava-vigraha	special images in a temple, taken out for worship on ceremonial and festival occasions
varada mudra	hand gesture of granting a wish
vault	arched covering over any space
vihara	monastery of the Buddhists and Jains
wing	side extensions of a building
yab-yum	father-mother; term applied to Tibetan images of god and goddess shown in union
yali	mythical crocodile-like creature

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